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ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

**Us and Them:  
Presenting America 1948-1956**

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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Preliminary version of arguments used in this thesis was presented at Prva Stran: International Student Conference of Comparative Literature in Ljubljana in December 2015 with the title “‘The Other America’: Constructing American Literature 1948-56,” and an eponymous article is going to be published in the conference publication.

## **Permission**

Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

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## Abstrakt

Tématem této diplomové práce je literatura Spojených států amerických v Československu mezi lety 1948 a 1956. Cílem bylo zjistit, jak byly Spojené státy reprezentovány skrze vybrané americké autory a jejich díla. První dvě kapitoly zkoumají vznik paralelního kánonu z historické a teoretické perspektivy. Třetí kapitola se věnuje Langstonu Hughesovi jako vybranému reprezentantovi americké poezie a ukazuje, jak byla jeho poezie použita k upoutání pozornosti k rasové diskriminaci v USA. Howard Fast, hvězda československé verze Ameriky, je tématem čtvrté kapitoly. Příklady jak Fasta, tak Hughese ukazují, že soudobí američtí autoři byli vybíráni proto, že poukazovali na rasové a společenské nerovnosti a potlačování politické opozice ve Spojených státech, a zároveň se sami identifikovali s takzvanou pokrokovou Amerikou. Čtením těchto autorů z východní strany železné opony lze přispět k současnému českému bádání, které se zabývá padesátými lety, a zároveň přidat nové úhly pohledu k probíhajícímu přezkoumávání amerických levicových autorů.

**Klíčová slova:** překladová literatura, Československo, padesátá léta, studená válka, transnacionalismus, američtí levicoví autoři, Howard Fast, Langston Hughes

## **Abstract**

This MA thesis discusses contemporary US literature in Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1956 in order to see how the US was represented through the chosen American writers and their works. The first two chapters look at how the parallel canon was established, both from historical and theoretical perspective. The third chapter discusses Langston Hughes as the representative of American poetry. It shows how Hughes was used to draw attention to racial inequality in the US. Howard Fast as the superstar of the “Czechoslovak America” is the focus of the fourth chapter. The cases of both Fast and Hughes show that contemporary US authors published in Czechoslovakia at that time were chosen for the way they depicted the US racial and social inequality and the repression of political opposition, and identified themselves as members of the so called progressive America. Reading Hughes and Fast from the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain contributes to Czech scholarship on the 1950s and adds new perspectives to the contemporary reconsiderations of American leftist writers.

**Keywords:** literature in translation, Czechoslovakia, 1950s, Cold War, transnationalism, American leftist writers, Howard Fast, Langston Hughes

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## Introduction

US literature as presented between 1948 and 1956 in Czechoslovakia is almost unrecognizable from today's perspective. "We could publish only one American contemporary novel per year and it always had to be Howard Fast," says Eva Kondrysová who worked as an editor in the state publishing house which focused on literature in translation.<sup>1</sup> An astonishing number of 35 works by Fast was published in this period; in contrast to only three novels by Hemingway and none by Faulkner (both Hemingway and Faulkner received Nobel Prize in Literature in this period). Apart from Fast, there were other contemporary American writers, though none of them got even close to Fast in the number of published works: Albert Maltz, Alexander Sexton, Lloyd Brown and Albert Halper. In conventional histories of American literature, these names do not appear. The only name recognizable for today's reader is Langston Hughes, the only US poet whose collection was published during this period in Czechoslovakia.

The choice of these authors was no coincidence. In the Czechoslovakia and other countries under the Soviet sphere of influence, the state apparatus guarded the literary borders. It had an absolute control over the book publishing, both by the means of censorship and the direct influence on editing plans of the publishing companies. As Michal Bauer puts it, the representatives of state decided what and how are texts going to be "presented to the recipients" and also "official framework for interpretation."<sup>2</sup> Literature in translation often provided models for understanding different cultures. This made the translation of US literature a precarious task. The voices from the enemy's camp had to be chosen carefully. Even more than the political orientations of the authors, the criteria were how they presented America in their works. The image of American literature and America was not only the result of the particular choice of authors, but of the work of translators, critics and editors. The

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1. "Na současnou americkou literaturu jsme v padesátých letech měli proctor pro jeden titul ročně. A musel to být vždycky Howard Fast." Eva Kondrysová, "Literatura nezná hranic," interview by Petruška Šustrová, in *Služebníci slova*, ed. Petruška Šustrová (Prague: Pulchra, 2008), 162.

2. Michal Bauer, *Souvislosti labyrintu: Kodifikace ideologicko-estetické normy v české literatuře 50. let 20. století* (Prague: Akropolis, 2009), 8.



aim of this thesis is to examine the cultural mechanisms behind these representations and show the ways the texts were engaged to tell a particular story about America.

The first chapter maps cultural politics and institutional structures in Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1956. The next chapter is dedicated to the general mechanics of the transnational exchange, here further complicated by the Cold War framework. The two following chapters deal with Hughes and Fast and their reception in both the US and Czechoslovakia. These chapters focus on how America was presented in translations of their texts: Hughes's collection put together by Jaroslav Bouček in 1950 *O America zpívám* [*I Sing of America*] and *Thirty Pieces of Silver*, play by Howard Fast, which had its world premiere in Prague in 1951.

In the last decade, critics have problematized the depoliticized canon of American literature in the 1950s. This entails attention to previously neglected writers of the American Left. The Eastern side of the Iron Curtain can provide important context for these reconsiderations as these writers were often published there at a time when they were neglected or even blacklisted in the US. In the Czech context, the 1950s was a traumatic era. Contemporary historians and in part literary critics also are questioning received narratives of this period. By focusing on literature in translation, we can further illuminate how meanings were created through the tension between discourse and ideology. What image of US literature and the US in general were the works of the chosen American authors supposed to evoke?

## Chapter 1: The Structures of Power

If, in the coldest era of the Cold War, an US reader and a Czechoslovak reader met and wished to discuss contemporary American literature, they would quickly discover that there were few works they had both read. The disparity is not untypical for the Cold War or even for literary cultures in two different languages. However, in the 1950s it was difficult for an author's work to obtain a literary visa and cross through the Iron Curtain. There were, in effect, two distinct canons of American literature. What are the reasons for the "Czechoslovak" American canon? What institutional mechanisms established it?

Between 1948 and 1956, American literature (and through it, also America itself) was represented in a specific way, and it prompts us to ask, in Edward Said's words, "for what purpose, by whom, and with what components."<sup>1</sup> Chapters three and four deal with specific components of this construction, chapter two with the general mechanics of these constructions in context of transnational exchanges. This chapter focuses on the institutional agents and their historical context. The aim here is not to provide a complete picture of the cultural politics of that time, but to illustrate some of the mechanisms that were crucial for publishing American literature.

In the popular imagination, the Czechoslovak literary scene during the 1950s is connected with the nationalization of book publishing, brutal show trials with writers, and schematic odes on factory workers. It all seems suspiciously clear. Michal Bauer describes this "clarity" as his major motive for studying the period: "Why there is no Ricoeurian confrontation of different narratives in reception of such a dramatic period of our history? Is literature of the 1950s really so transparent?"<sup>2</sup> Bauer wrote this thirteen years ago. The development of Czech critical discourse since then confirms his suspicion that, in fact, this period was not transparent at all.

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1. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 314.

2. "Proč při recepci tohoto tak dramatického období našich dějin nedochází k oné ricoeurovské konfrontaci různých se vyprávění? Je vskutku literatura 50.let tak transparentní?" Michal Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť* (Prague: H+H, 2003), 271.

## 2.1 Behind the Publishing Politics

In order to understand the literature that was produced, translated and published, it is necessary to understand the role of literature in the political system. Jiřina Šmejkalová sums up the contemporaneous view of literature as not being “out there for itself; it always *serves* some extra-literary purpose, by acting as a depository of positive knowledge about or at least as an illustration of a certain social phenomenon.”<sup>3</sup>

Šmejkalová, in her book *Cold War Books in the ‘Other’ Europe and What Came After* (2011) ambitiously describes the “the making and breaking of the specific system of publishing, selling and reading books that existed in the centrally controlled socioeconomic systems of the former socialist countries in the region of Eastern and Central Europe.”<sup>4</sup> In her analysis, she focuses on the sociological conditions and implications of the changes in publishing of both fiction and non-fiction, and also the myths associated with them. As she claims, “The main aim of communist cultural management was not just to jail rebellious poets, but to put books into the hands of the people.”<sup>5</sup>

Critics still debate the degree to which Czechoslovak post-war literature sprung from the pre-war tradition and to what degree it was imported from the Soviet Union. As Šmejkalová claims, while the management and production of culture weren’t exactly the same as those in Moscow, “the Soviet Union was in the front line of experimentation with centrally controlled culture and was also a key producer of knowledge on cultural practices.”<sup>6</sup> However, in relation to book publishing, Šmejkalová stresses that “attempts to regulate and control book production had been part of the socio-cultural dynamics of the country for decades, if not centuries.”<sup>7</sup> These attempts were always presented as beneficial: in 1949, the newspapers talked about an expansion of this freedom by removing market relations from culture, which would enable its true form, not limited by the need to make a profit. As Václav Kopecký, the Minister of Information, in a speech accompanying nationalization

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3. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books in the ‘Other’ Europe and What Came After* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 38.

4. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 24.

5. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 19.

6. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 43. This question, however, is also significant for Western scholarship dealing with the period. Does the Sovietisation taking place in different regions imply they can be dealt with together? Not really: Šmejkalová lists “national cultural histories, pre-socialist legacies, and particular political sensitivities and obsessions” as major points of difference in each country.

Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 61.

7. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 129.

remarked definitively that, the aim of centrally planned book publishing was to “meet the cultural needs of the people.”<sup>8</sup>

The cultural needs of people were to be met universally: access to books was supposed to be granted by these changes. This was to be achieved by increasing the number of copies and limiting the number of titles.<sup>9</sup> More people could reach certain texts without the state having to provide more resources to publishers: allegedly, the number of published titles decreased by half, but print-runs were almost twice as high.<sup>10</sup> However, the titles that were printed in such large quantities needed to be carefully chosen. Together with changes in the library system, this limited the choice of individual readers; paper shortages were in both cases used to explain the absence of certain works.<sup>11</sup>

Private publishing houses were nationalized in March 1949. This allowed full control over this sector without the need for any institutional censorship, as the publishing plans of politically reliable publishers were overseen by the National Board and publishing houses seen as unreliable were not granted permission to publish. Their stock was taken by the state which decided which unpublished books were to be destroyed. This reorganization continued in 1952, when publishing was entirely regrouped.<sup>12</sup> The new publishing houses (nine centralized publishing houses, three publishing houses directed by the Party, seven for specific organizations) were responsible for specific areas, genres and topic, of which they were supposed to publish only what they considered the best.<sup>13</sup> Different types of literature were allotted different amounts of paper. Also the origin of texts was subjected to central planning. Eva Forstová remarks that in 1952, 156 Czechoslovak, 140 Soviet and 72 foreign (divided into further categories) titles were allowed to be published.<sup>14</sup>

Forstová in her book *Knihy podle norem: Kulturní instituce v system řízené kultury. Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury, hudby a umění* [*Books According to*

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8. “uspokojení kulturních potřeb lidu” Václav Kopecký, “Řeč,” in *Knihy do rukou lidu!: Zákon o vydávání a rozšiřování knih, hudebnin a jiných neperiodických publikací: projevy a dokumenty* (Prague: Ministerstvo informací a osvěty, 1949), 11. Eva Forstová asks, what these needs are. Another question that needs to be asked here is who is determining them. Eva Forstová, *Knihy podle norem. Kulturní instituce v system řízené kultury. Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury, hudby a umění* (Prague: Charles University, Faculty of Arts Publishing House, 2013), 15.

9. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 116.

10. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 119.

11. Petr Šámal, *Soustružníci lidských duší: Lidové knihovny a jejich cenzura na počátku padesátých let 20. století* (Prague: Academia, 2009), 81.

12. Forstová, 64.

13. Forstová, 65.

14. Forstová, 68

*Norms: Cultural Institutions in the Cultural Command System: State Publishing House of Fiction, Music and Art*] (2013) maps the situation in publishing between 1949 and 1953 and the birth of the State Publishing House of Fiction, Music and Art, that was later, under the name of Odeon, the main house that published literature in translation. She explains the specifics of this centrally controlled system, as the free market was replaced by the Soviet model of directive planning.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to capitalist systems, the plans did not function as mere prognoses but they were supposed to play an active role in determining the future.<sup>16</sup> This meant that fulfillment of plans was an indication of success, not profit.<sup>17</sup> Šmejkalová characterizes the change:

[Publishing] was no longer defined as a set of activities leading to the *reproduction and sale* of numerous copies of a text. In practical terms, publishing primarily involved *negotiation* over controlled access to resources, such as printing technologies and the paper supply, and over permission to copy and distribute.<sup>18</sup>

Or, as Miklós Haraszti puts it, “Permission replaces purchase.”<sup>19</sup> Where did these negotiations take place? Who gave permission?

## 2.2 Institutions

Critical discourse of the last twenty years brought attention to the previously covert mechanisms of official institutions. This direction replaces the earlier paradigm which used to “judge, rather than interpret the relicts of the Communist past.”<sup>20</sup> (Pavel Janoušek thinks that, in the Czech context, the attempts to analyze what happened from today’s perspective too often resemble a “gesture of a critics and a preacher.”<sup>21</sup>) One example of the text which presents the institution through archive work would be Alexej Klusák’s *Kultura a politika v Československu 1945–1956* [*Culture and Politics in Czechoslovakia 1945–1956*] (1998). His conclusions were partly

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15. Forstová, 10.

16. Forstová, 12.

17. Forstová, 11. It is important to realize that while this model caused an extreme closure of the whole system, the fact that the profit did not play any significant role also enabled for usually marginalized texts to be published: often cited examples are the print runs of poetry (astonishing for today’s reader) and also translations from minor literatures. On the other hand, although the publishing houses were fulfilling their plans, the readership could not be so easily influenced and many books were simply not sold. Forstová, 94.

18. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 147.

19. Miklós Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison. Artists under State Socialism* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 81.

20. “postoj, který se jal relikty komunistické minulosti hodnotit spíše než interpretovat” Vít Schmarc, “Je na čase stopy číst, ne zahlazovat,” *A2 Alarm*, September 17, 2008, accessed February 24, 2016.

21. “gesto kritika a kazatele” Pavel Janoušek, “Návrat k sobě, návrat k malým,” *Tvar*, October 7, 2004, 12–13.

challenged by Jiří Knapík, an author of *Únor a kultura: Sovětizace české kultury 1948–1950* [*The February and Culture: The Sovietisation of Czech Culture 1948–1950*] (2003) and *V zajetí moci: kulturní politika, její systém a aktéři 1948–1956* [*Captured by Power: Cultural Politics, Its System and Participants*] (2006). Knapík's approach (he works with arguments and vocabulary of that period) was still seen as controversial twelve years ago: Pavel Kosatík labeled his method as “reading cultural history the Bolshevik way.”<sup>22</sup>

Control was exercised at three levels: the state (Ministry of Information, since 1953 Ministry of Culture), the Party and at a professional level (through the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, which came into existence in 1948 when Czech and Slovak Syndicates were merged).<sup>23</sup> For book publishing, the key players in this period were Národní ediční rada česká [Czech National Editorial Board] and Národní ediční rada slovenská [Slovak National Editorial Board], later united as Ústřední rada [Central Board], directly under Ministry of Information. As Knapík describes the system, there was a board which received internal readers' reports from each publishing house, and it then decided whether or not a book would be published.<sup>24</sup> It is important that the board was, as Pavel Šámal claims, the “institution of both preliminary and consecutive control”:<sup>25</sup> it vetted those to be published and also had the power to pulp books which had already been printed.

Books were usually printed before all the reports came in. This effectively meant a form of self-censorship, as there were high sanctions for those who would suggest a book that had to be suspended from the production or distribution.<sup>26</sup> After reorganization in 1952, the main responsibility for judging the ideological soundness of a text was the individual editor's. Forstová describes this paradoxical situation, typical of this period, when an editor could be punished for breaking an ideological norm that had never been exactly defined.<sup>27</sup> This was one of the greatest advantages

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22. “čtení kulturní historie na bolševický způsob” Pavel Kosatík, “Trojí čtení kulturní historie na bolševický způsob,” *Hospodářské noviny*, July 21, 2004, 10.

23. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 151.

24. Jiří Knapík, *V zajetí moci: kulturní politika, její systém a aktéři 1948–1956* (Prague: Libri, 2006), 301.

25. “institute předběžné i následné cenzury” Šámal, 19.

26. Forstová, 142.

27. Forstová, 157.

of the elusive terms “Socialist Realism” and “progressive literature” for the authorities: it could be flexibly used to either condemn or cherish a specific work.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.3 Norms

Michal Bauer views this notion of the ideological norm as fundamental. His research looks closely at the actual texts, even as he describes the ideological conditions in which the books had been born. His three works, *Ideologie a paměť* [*Ideology and Memory*] (2003), *Tiseň tmy* [*The Distress of Darkness*] (2005) and *Souvislosti labyrintu* [*The Connection of Labyrinth*] (2009) are significant especially because of the detailed work with archives and contemporaneous materials.

According to Bauer, to adhere to this aesthetic norm was at the same time to diverge from it.<sup>29</sup> Here he uses Mukařovský's concept of the aesthetic norm, which “is not directed towards any practical aim but towards the object as such.”<sup>30</sup>

Czechoslovak socialism of the time did not admit the autonomy of literature.

Literature is subordinated to politics, and its message should be “unambiguous and definite; literature should support the reader's enthusiasm and working performance and so contribute to the building of the new society.”<sup>31</sup>

How was this to be achieved? Bauer stresses the importance of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union conferences. He especially notes something he calls “the cult of the classics,” choosing a model in each discipline.<sup>32</sup> This model was then supposed to be imitated. He shows that new works should mimic reality and also approved classics of the past.<sup>33</sup> This helped contextualize the new art, and demonstrated continuity.<sup>34</sup> The main promulgator of this specific feature of Czechoslovak socialism was Zdeněk Nejedlý, a historian and art critic who combined

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28. The leading principle of such literary criticism could be summoned under “give a dog a bad name and hang him.” Though the practice was far from amusing for the condemned writers and editors, Josef Škvorecký describes the phenomena rather amusingly:

“A novel about intellectuals? There are no positive characters. There are positive characters? There are no workers among them. There are worker? Then there are surely no communists. There are communists? The work does not properly show the leading role of the Party.”

“Román o intelektuálech? Nejsou tam kladné typy. Jsou tam kladné typy? Nejsou mezi nimi dělníci. Jsou mezi nimi dělníci? Nejsou mezi nimi komunisté. Jsou mezi nimi komunisté? Neukazuje vedoucí úlohu Strany.” Josef Škvorecký, “Některé pohledy na americkou literaturu,” *Světová literatura* 5/1956, 182.

29. Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 8.

30. “nesměřuje k praktickému cíli, ale míří k samotnému objektu” Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 18.

31. “jednoznačné a definitivní, měla podporovat čtenářovo nadšení i pracovní výkon a tak se podílet na budování nové společnosti” Šámal, 139.

32. Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 13.

33. Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 23.

34. Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 13.

the traditional national narrative with communism and interpreted the 1950s as the “new national revival.”<sup>35</sup> Using Paul Ricoeur’s concept, Bauer views this as an attempt to establish a new history to be taught and celebrated.<sup>36</sup>

And spectacular celebrations did really take place: the book was, after all, defined as a national good and as such, had to be protected. Šmejkalová writes:

A part of this ‘protective’ argument was the even more powerful idea that it is possible, if not actually necessary, for the authorities outside the institutional system of book production and reception to make decisions about which texts to include in (and exclude from) the concept of ‘national culture.’<sup>37</sup>

Justin Quinn remarks that the fights about the definition texts (and non-texts) were integral to every struggle for authority over culture: “the cultural works that did not adhere to the new social order were, by definition, no longer culture.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the texts that did not fit the norm needed to be “destroyed and suppressed.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, as Bauer claims, the “agreement with such a norm, the identification with it, is reflected not only as a matter of aesthetics but it is also the basis for the moral value of an individual.”<sup>40</sup> Arguably, such a tactic is employed whenever a new norm is asserted. However, Bauer sees two major particularities: there is the “attempt to canonize the norm and to make law out of it,”<sup>41</sup> and also the actual legality of the norm (in judicial proceedings with writers, their works were used against them).<sup>42</sup>

But what was the essence of the new norm? As remarked above, Socialist Realism is notoriously difficult to define. If one attempts to trace the aesthetics back to Marxism, it does not become any easier. Forstová reminds us of the different interpretations of Marx’s theories, some of which directly contradict Marx’s views.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, as Šmejkalová claims, “There has never been any simple link between leftist or Marxist views on society and culture and real-life experimentation with regulated cultural production.”<sup>44</sup> Forstová, however, draws on Andrei Zhdanov when

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35. Bauer, *Souvislosti labyrintu*, 116.

36. Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 8.

37. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 142.

38. Justin Quinn, *Between Two Fires: Transnationalism and Cold War Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 65.

39. Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 13.

40. “Souhlas s takovou normou, identifikace s ní je reflektována ne pouze jako estetická záležitost, ale má zakládat i morální hodnotu jedince.” Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 23.

41. “snaha normu kanonizovat a povýšit ji na zákon” Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 16.

42. Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 17.

43. Forstová, 19–20.

44. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 40.



she declares the truthful depiction of reality and ideological re-education as the main aims of socialist realist art.<sup>45</sup> As Zhdanov himself said in one of his speeches,

The truthfulness and historical exactitude of the artistic image must be linked with the task of ideological transformation, of the education of the working people in the spirit of socialism. This method in fiction and literary criticism is what we call the method of socialist realism.<sup>46</sup>

Bauer notes that this “truthfulness” was based on a certain, ideologically determined perception of reality, and adds “intelligibility” as one of the main demands of the period.<sup>47</sup>

However, the *existence* of these norms does not imply that the works that were written and translated were in complete agreement with it. As Bauer concludes, the autochthonous concept of literature continually prompts it to try to “emancipate itself.”<sup>48</sup> In his view, the creative act is in itself a violation of the norm.<sup>49</sup> He remarks that it is not the literature of the 1950s that is schematic, but rather the interpretations of the period texts and often of the period itself.<sup>50</sup>

## 2.4 “Scalpel Used Upon One’s Own Body”

The basis for a different notion of the period was outlined in the early 1990s Vladimír Macura in his book *Šťastný věk: Symboly, emblémy a mýty 1948–89* [*The Joyous Age: Symbols, Emblems, Myths 1948–89*] (1992). Macura claims that focusing on the “language of propaganda” (a code spoken by “them”) provides an alibi. Instead, we should analyze culture as a collective product:

‘The World of Socialism’ as a semiotic construct can no longer be considered something comfortably external. It belongs to us; we have helped to create it.

Its analysis is our concern much like a scalpel used upon one’s own body.<sup>51</sup>

Even over two decades later, critical debates (for example the controversy surrounding the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes) indicate the continued relevance of this issue.

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45. Forstová, 47.

46. Andrei Zhdanov, “On Literature: Speech at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934,” *Revolutionary Democracy*, accessed March 1, 2016.

47. Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 25.

48. “umění se bude z této podřízenosti stále vymaňovat” Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 18.

49. Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 19. However, as Forstová comments on Bauer’s use of this term, Mukařovský’s concept of norm works with a common consensus, while the norms of this period are more similar to laws, as the breaking of such norms results in punishment. Forstová, 58.

50. Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 270.

51. ‘Svět socialismu’ jako sémiotický konstrukt však už nemůže být chápán jako něco útěšně vnějšího. Je náš, byli jsme jeho spolutvůrci. Jeho analýza se nás dotýká jako skalpel obrácený k vlasnímu tělu.” Vladimír Macura, *Šťastný věk. Symboly, emblem a mýty 1948–1989* (Prague: Pražská imaginace, 1992), 7.

In relation to cultural politics of the 1950s, Alessandro Catalano in his study *Rudá záře nad literaturou. Česká literatura mezi socialismem a undergroundem (1945–1959)* [*Red Glow over Literature: Czech Literature between Socialism and 'Underground' 1945–1959*] (2008) also tries to find the productive space between the official and the suppressed. As he claims in this study (which mostly summarizes other sources: the book was partly intended as a textbook for Italian students of Czech literature), “without mass participation, the whole process would be unthinkable.”<sup>52</sup> Catalano criticizes the understanding of totality as a “long (and boring) period without any internal development.”<sup>53</sup> His Foucauldian approach resonates with a major trend in history. As Foucault claims,

Power must be analyzed as something that circulates, or rather something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through net-like organizations.<sup>54</sup>

This concept moves away from the “Us and Them” type of narrative. However, Šmejkalová claims that the American scholarship is still partly shaped by the Cold War mentality and the “totalitarian myth.” The result of this myth is that “the analytical focus on the most visible ‘oppressors’ and those most ‘oppressed’, namely, the communists and their opposition, clearly gave rise to binary explanatory schemes.”<sup>55</sup> And these binary explanatory schemes are often applied also to literature of that period.

## 2.5 Literature

It is ironic that in criticism that claimed to be apolitical, the politics of individual works and their origin played such a great role. In Western criticism of the Cold War and its aftermath, the predominant subject is that of dissidence or the underground. As Šmejkalová writes, “Studies of communist regime-controlled culture have largely been concerned with the alternative and oppositional spheres, and the narratives of ‘censorship’ have dominated the portraits of official spheres of culture.”<sup>56</sup> As a consequence, the official works are often seen as “direct exercise of power and the

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52. Alessandro Catalano, *Rudá záře nad literaturou. Česká literatura mezi socialismem a undergroundem (1945–1959)* (Brno: Host, 2008), 132.

53. Catalano, 11.

54. Michael Foucault, “Two Lectures,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 98.

55. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 5.

56. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 113.

exclusion of a certain body of texts by a clearly defined, centrally positioned force.”<sup>57</sup> Scholars on the other side of the Iron Curtain have, after its fall, often adopted this narrative too readily. As Catalano claims, “the culture of forty years of communism is still considered something undesirable and it is labeled as primitive, vulgar and crude – and especially foreign.”<sup>58</sup>

In a book that was important for the change of paradigm, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (written already in 1981), Katerina Clark describes the typical reactions when she mentions her research topic. As she concludes:

Soviet Socialist Realism is virtually a taboo topic in Western Slavic scholarship. It is not entirely taboo, for it can be discussed, but preferably only in tones of outrage, bemusement, derision, or elegy. Three main arguments underpin this collective judgment. First, it is felt to be intellectually suspect – or simply a waste of time-to analyze what is patently bad literature [...] Second, it is argued that it is virtually immoral to devote attention to a tradition that has developed at the cost of so many violations of intellectual freedom and integrity, of so much human suffering. Finally, it is felt that Socialist Realism is itself so lifeless and dull that any study of it would of necessity be hopelessly pedestrian (unless, of course, enlivened by tales of infamy or by acerbic comments).<sup>59</sup>

Clark’s book was one of the works that started the reconsideration of the previously overlooked works of socialist realism. This reconsideration does not concern only texts from the Eastern side of the Curtain, but also texts that were praised by the official structures there. These have been often overlooked or dismissed by the critics: Rossen Djagalov claims it is the result of the development of Cold War criticism he confirms that “the tendency to mechanically put minuses where official propaganda had once put pluses have practically precluded a more objective reception and study of leftist writers from outside the bloc.”<sup>60</sup>

These reconsiderations usually take place in a monolingual framework, such as the reconsideration of American leftist writers or revisiting of forgotten Czechoslovak texts. In the Cold War framework, however, a transnational approach is needed, as nation and power blocs entered into new types of dialogues. As Justin Quinn claims in *Between Two Fires: Transnationalism and Cold War Poetry* (2015):

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57. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 113.

58. “Kultura čtyřiceti let komunismu je stále považována za cosi nežádoucího a bývá globálně odmítána jako primitivní, vulgární a hrubá – a hlavně ,cizí.“ Catalano, 15.

59. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), ix–x.

60. Rossen Djagalov, “I Don’t Boast About It, but I’m the Most Widely Read Author of This century’: Howard Fast and International Leftist Literary Culture, ca. MidTwentieth Century,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 27.2 (2009), accessed December 2, 2015, 41.

“we find out more about cultural phenomena not by exploring them within one national or linguistic framework, but when they travel, and negotiate with each other.”<sup>61</sup> In the period between 1948 and 1956, the movement between nations and power blocs was tightly patrolled. The institutional mechanisms in Czechoslovakia created a specific environment for transnational exchange. What were the rules of this exchange?

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61. Quinn, 25.

## Chapter 2: Narrating America

When our imaginary American reader meets with his Czech counterpart nowadays, the disparity in what they imagine American literature to be would be significantly smaller, as the movement of cultural artifacts is significantly freer. However, it does not mean that a cultural artifact can travel across the ocean, or even across any cultural border unchanged: as Edward Said claims, “No country is exempt from the debate about what is to be read, taught, or written,”<sup>1</sup> and this debate also involves literature in translation.

Before we look at specific examples of the Czechoslovak reception of US literature between 1948 and 1956, it is necessary to sketch the general means by which literature travels. The situation in Czechoslovakia offers a specific environment for transnational exchange. Not only does this environment, almost hermetically sealed, offer a unique opportunity to track the few American works that got past the borders of ideology, but it also offers a magnified glimpse of the nature of this exchange. As Quinn writes about Cold War cultural transactions:

Tracks were covered, politic emphases were adjusted, biographies were edited, so that transnational exchange could take place; going further, these appear to be the very conditions for transnational exchange in general.<sup>2</sup>

Itamar Even-Zohar claims that literature in translation is especially important when a new national culture is emerging, as it distinguishes and defines itself.<sup>3</sup> Although Czech literature already went through the initial period of cultural revival after it gained independence in 1918 (not to mention the National Revival which took place during the 19<sup>th</sup> century), the changes after the 1948 *coup d'état* were presented precisely as a fresh start for culture. The discourse was strictly nationalistic: as Macura writes, the “new world” was presented as also a return to traditional and authentic “Czech values.”<sup>4</sup>

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1. Said, 318.

2. Quinn, 9.

3. Itamar Even-Zohar, “The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem,” *Poetics Today* 11.1 (1990), 47.

4. Macura, 64.

In this context, literature in translation needed to be carefully chosen in order to support the new national narrative. These choices involved not only literature from the same political setting (although the number of translations from Russian and other languages of the Eastern bloc was significantly higher), but also the literature from the other side of the Iron Curtain.

### 3.1 Imagined Literatures

That literature plays an important role in the construction of nations is one of the main theses of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). National literatures (like nations themselves) are created through inclusion,<sup>5</sup> as Anderson claims, but also, as Anthony W. Marx adds, through exclusion.<sup>6</sup> Homi K. Bhabha elaborates on Anderson's thesis in *Nation and Narration* (1990). He claims that national culture is "neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself," nor does it contrast with the space outside of this culture: "the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity."<sup>7</sup>

Nationalist discourse attempts to deny this hybridity and tries to establish an authorized version of the national essence. Pascale Casanova, in her ground-breaking book *The World Republic of Letters* (2004), which draws heavily on Anderson, describes the particularities of this process in the establishing of national literatures from a diachronic perspective.

Acquaintance with the texts of a particular national pantheon and knowledge of the major dates of a country's nationalized literary history had the effect of transforming an artificial construction into an object of shared learning and belief. Within the closed environment of the nation, the process of differentiation and essentialization created familiar and analyzable cultural distinctions: national peculiarities were insisted upon and cultivated, chiefly through the schools, with the result that references, citations, and allusions to the national literary past became the private property of native speakers. National peculiarities thus acquired a reality of their own, and helped in turn to produce a literature that was consistent with accepted national categories.<sup>8</sup> As a result of what Casanova calls differentiation and opposition, not only national identity, but also the identities of everything outside the national borders are

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5. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 25.

6. Anthony W. Marx, *Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origin of Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16.

7. Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating a Nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge), 4.

8. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 106.

established.<sup>9</sup> The need to identify oneself in contrast to others is nothing new and it was a necessary part of the nation-building process.<sup>10</sup>

In the Cold war context, however, it further complicated by the membership of particular nations in either Eastern, or Western power bloc. This provided contexts that exceeded the national frameworks. Moreover, the ideology of the Eastern bloc was based on class as a key factor for identification. It was class membership that was supposed to unite people across the national borders and even across the Iron Curtain.

“Two nations in every nation, two cultures in every national culture – this truth, discovered by the classics of Marxism-Leninism, runs like Ariadne’s thread through history,” writes Jaroslav Bouček.<sup>11</sup> Although class is seen as the primary divide, nationalism as a concept does not disappear: Vladimir I. Lenin’s interpretation of Marx distinguished between the nationalism of the oppressor and of the oppressed.<sup>12</sup> Lenin wrote that “the nation state is *typical* and normal for the capitalist period,”<sup>13</sup> and the task of socialists is to “take *from each* national culture *only* its democratic and socialist elements; we take them *only* and *absolutely* in opposition to the bourgeois culture and the bourgeois nationalism of *each* nation.”<sup>14</sup> This view establishes a specific duality in the perception of literature.

### 3.2 The World Republic of Leftist Letters

Casanova sees the world literature as a cultural field (here, she is indebted to Bourdieu’s notion of field). Although it also consists of a number of smaller fields, she sees it generally as a homogenous space with its centre in Paris.<sup>15</sup> Paris, allegedly with the highest amount of “cultural capital” (a term borrowed from Bourdieu) has according to her the ability to consecrate the individual works and create values.<sup>16</sup>

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9. This is enabled also by language as a “marker of difference.” Casanova, 36.

10. Casanova, 191. However, Casanova sees this phase of the creation of national literature as positive in postcolonial nation states, and inherently negative in case of “regulation of literary creativity by an authoritarian regime.” (Casanova, 113) Generally, Casanova sees the politically engaged (and, at worst, also realist) writing as a necessarily “lower stage” on the way to literary autonomy. Casanova, 86.

11. “Dva národy v každém národě, dvě kultury v každé národní kultuře—tato pravda, zjištěná klasiky marxismu-leninismu se vine jako červená nit dějinami.” Jaroslav Bouček, *Trubadůři nenávisli: studie o současné západní úpadkové literatuře* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1952), 5.

12. Anderson relates this to contemporary Marxist theory and writes that nationalisms turned into “uncomfortable anomaly” (Anderson, 3) in this context, especially in contrast to “historic Marxist commitment to proletarian internationalism and the destruction of feudal and capitalist states.” Anderson, 161.

13. Vladimir I. Lenin, *Marxism & Nationalism*, (Chippendale: Resistance Books, 2002), 79.

14. Lenin, 55.

15. Casanova, 108.

16. Casanova, 127.

However, cultural capital is only accumulated with the help of other participants. When Casanova writes about writers with a high amount of this capital, she claims that authority is only granted to the individual writer

by virtue of the belief that he has earned his ‘name’; it is therefore what he believes himself to have, what others believe him to have and consequently the power to which it is agreed he is entitled.<sup>17</sup>

In the perspective determined by class, Paris might be the centre of bourgeois culture (which is seen as non-culture), but it would be denied any power in relation to “progressive” culture of the working class. It was Moscow which consecrated writers and works, set trends, served as a final authority.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Casanova uses the number of polyglots as a decisive factor:<sup>19</sup> by its aggressive language politics, Moscow successfully extended the “symbolic value” of Russian.

Rossen Djagalov, in his essay “‘I Don’t Boast About It, but I’m the Most Widely Read Author of This Century’: Howard Fast and International Leftist Literary Culture, ca Mid-Twentieth Century” (2009) describes the counterpart of Western literary space, “the world republic of leftist letters,” which emerged from economical and ideological opposition. Djagalov uses Howard Fast’s bright career in this field as an example of the mechanics of “mid-twentieth century international leftist literary culture, with its cultural formations, institutions, networks and readership, which is as forgotten today as Fast himself.”<sup>20</sup>

Although almost forgotten today, the republic of leftist letters once offered serious competition in the fight for world dominance over literature. It was an organic field which united people with different aims, different version of left-wing politics, different motivation: Djagalov stresses this in order to disprove the myth that “Kremlin gold” was the driving force behind this field.<sup>21</sup>

Important elements of this competition between East and West were the prizes the sides were able to allot to their members: the West had the Nobel Prize, the East had the Peace Prize, awarded by the World Peace Council and also Soviet-awarded International Prize for Strengthening Peace Among Peoples. Various events connected to these prizes (most importantly, conferences) and also the World Peace

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17. Casanova, 17.

18. Later, this served as yet another method how to “smuggle in” certain works: to find any Soviet critic who said anything positive about the particular work.

19. Casanova, 20.

20. Djagalov, 41.

21. Sometimes quite to the contrary: the USSR did not pay any royalties to the foreign writers as it did not sign the Geneva copyright convention until the 1970s. Djagalov, 44.



Council were attended by international participants: the world republic of leftist letters was not limited to the geographical area of Soviet influence. The memberships in the republics of letters were not mutually exclusive: however, as both East and West sought different values in literature, success in both was improbable, especially in the first years of the Cold War.

Djagalov identifies the key principles of this leftist literary space— canonization, excommunication, membrane effect, and monopoly effect. Of course, these are necessarily a part of *every* cultural exchange. The peculiarity of the situation during the Cold War is the command system which, in the first years at least, excluded the influence of the market. An overt, yet by no means clearly defined ideology was the main factor in the choices of texts.

Only a small part of US cultural production crossed Czechoslovak borders: but this amount then represented that country's cultural production as a whole. The result was a parallel canon (created through both canonization and excommunication). According to Djagalov, the existence of this parallel (Djagalov uses the term "minor") canon caused the fracturing of the global leftist community, together with the "Soviet practice of granting monopoly rights on literary relations to the Soviet Union to one or a very small number of writers from particular foreign country."<sup>22</sup> As Fast's case shows, the regime could never control these chosen representatives entirely.

However, the fatal blow for the leftist republic of letters was Khrushchev's speech in 1957, together with Soviet military interventions in Poland and Hungary in 1956. After Khrushchev revealed Stalin's crimes, even previously pro-Soviet leftists reconsidered their membership and mostly lapsed into silence (this silence created a void that was later filled by the New Left in the 1960s, which, however, had different aims and allegiances).

This development had a huge impact on the publication of Central and Eastern European authors in the US. As Djagalov claims, a new coalition was formed, "between Western Slavicists and the growing number of East European émigrés, and the anti-Soviet dissidents from which the latter had emerged."<sup>23</sup> He acknowledges the unquestionable contribution of that coalition and also their personal stories and sacrifices, but he also notes the fact that this coalition strengthened the attempts to forget the existence of the American Left, shaped the reception of culture from behind

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22. Djagalov, 52.

23. Djagalov, 52.

the Iron Curtain for years to come and it has left a heritage of “thoroughgoing conflation of the underlying ideological impetus behind socialism with the historic experience and actual regimes of state socialism.”<sup>24</sup>

### 3.4 Gatekeepers

But what were the coalitions that shaped the reception of the US literature in Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1956? We have already looked at the ideological barriers and the institutions that were supposed to guarantee the ideological purity of the received work. However, the deciding factors were the individual people. Michal Bauer uses Kurt Levin’s term “gatekeepers”<sup>25</sup> to describe them.

Not surprisingly, the Party only appointed “politically reliable” people in this sphere. These people also wanted to retain their position: something Šmejkalová calls “self-regulating behaviour”<sup>26</sup> and Quinn “internalized self-censorship.”<sup>27</sup> As Forstová claims, their work put them under a particular pressure: the ideological form was not defined, yet any violation of it meant punishment, and thus the individual is permanently in danger.<sup>28</sup>

Each individual translator, editor, author or critic had their own expectations, as well as their specific background and a specific mindset. From today’s perspective, however, it is hard to determine (and it also is not our aim here) which texts are a result of compromise and which sprang more from the honest enthusiasm of its authors (a reason not to be excluded in the early years of socialism). The later generations could and have been interviewed, wrote memories and autobiographies. What remains the early 1950s is mainly the body of texts: translations, forewords, afterwords, reviews, literary critical texts.<sup>29</sup>

The key gatekeeper for US literature in this period was Jaroslav Bouček.<sup>30</sup> He wrote afterwords and forewords, edited and translated prose and poetry, most

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24. Djagalov, 52.

25. Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 8.

26. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 151.

27. Quinn, 45.

28. Forstová, 57.

29. Miroslav Zelinský looks at the literary critical texts in his book *Texty a obrazy (Stopy, které zůstaly)* [*Texts and Images: (Traces Left Behind)*] (2007). As he writes, the motivation for his book was the fact that a lot of these texts can still be found in the libraries, and it is even recommended as suitable literature for students of various subjects. Miroslav Zelinský, *Texty a obrazy (Stopy, které zůstaly)* (Ostrava: Protimluv, 2007), 9.

30. Although Bouček during this period, in accordance with the norm, strictly opposed adventurous stories, his life strongly reminded one. Bouček was born 1923. During the World War II, he was sent to forced labor to Germany, and when he returned, he was a part of the resistance movement. He studied

importantly a collection of poems by Langston Hughes, analyzed in the next chapter. Bouček also wrote an afterword to a collection of short stories by Albert Maltz *V džungli mrakodrapů* [*Skyscraper's Jungle*] (put together by Lubor Valenta).

What might seem an insignificant involvement with American literature must be understood in the context of the period. The collection of Hughes's poems was the only book dedicated to a single American poet, living or dead, that was published in these years (until the 1955 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, translated by Jiří Kolář and Zdeněk Urbánek). Bouček was not the only critic who dealt with American literature in that period but he created many paradigms that the following generations had to fight against.<sup>31</sup> He did so in his study *Trubadúři nenávisti: studie o současné západní úpadkové literatuře* [*Troubadours of Hate: A Study of Contemporary Western Decadent Literature*] (1952).

This work of literary criticism, a commentary upon contemporary Western literature, deserves closer attention. Here, Bouček uses all the tropes Zelinský labels as typical of the period: acute polarization, moral judgment, direct connection between the political convictions of an author and his achievements, and also not giving the full names of the authors-enemies.<sup>32</sup> When Josef Škvorecký criticized the text already four years later, his main objection was that books mentioned were inaccessible to Czech readers, and thus they could not check whether they agreed with Bouček's judgment or whether he is even factually right.<sup>33</sup> Often, this is not the case: Škvorecký mentions mistakes in translation, misspelled names ("Wallace Stephens"

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literature at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University and was the main editor of the Mladá fronta [Young Front] publishing house. He was involved in the Czech National Editorial Board, where he was a member of Komise pro vydávání cizích klasiků [Committee for Publishing Foreign Classics], and since 1950 he also worked in a committee responsible for the licensing procedure, crucial for each title. This was, however, only a start of his journey: as Bouček allegedly mastered more than ten languages, he was sent to Korea as a member of the International Committee for Repatriation of Prisoners of War. He spent the years 1956–1970 as a foreign correspondent in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Afterwards, he wrote several books describing his experiences there and he also published fiction. Apart from American writers, he translated and wrote afterwords to Anatole France and also put together and translated anthology of Nazim Hikmet poems. Jaroslav Bouček, *Reportérem na třech kontinentech* (Prague: Epoque, 2008), 7–8. Jiří Knapík, "Jaroslav Bouček," in *Kdo byl kdo v naší kulturní politice 1948–1953* (Prague: Libri, 2002), 57.

31. His monopoly on Western literature was also confirmed by his lecture on Western progressive authors on one of the regime's (unsuccessful) attempts to literarily create new writers, Školení pro začínající autory [Training for Beginning Authors] in summer 1951. Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, 261.

32. Zelinský, 42–47.

33. Josef Škvorecký, "Některé pohledy na americkou literaturu." *Světová literatura* 2 (1956), 182.

When he was writing about this period in retrospective, Bouček complained that he is often criticized by the next generation. He stresses that in publishing in the 1950s, an individual could not choose what would be published, and writes that, in these years, he was simply convinced, that the norms must be fulfilled even in literature. Jaroslav Bouček, "Ne všichni byli výborní," in *20 let nakladatelství Mladá fronta* (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1965), 23–25.

would be one of them, or the inconsistent spelling of Hemingway's name throughout the book), or mistakes in interpretation.<sup>34</sup> The text, although it mainly deals with the negative aspects of Western literatures, also introduces the "right" tradition of individual countries. America's only hope are, and always have been, its progressive writers, claims Bouček.<sup>35</sup> And he puts enormous effort into constructing this tradition.

### 3.5 Between the Reader and the Book

Emphasis on the progressive American tradition sprang not only from the vision of literature determined by the notion of class, but also from a practical question: the literary arbiters of the regime needed to not only prescribe what should be read and translated, but somehow deal with the extant literary tradition. As Šmejkalová reminds us, the majority of people simply bought, borrowed and read the books that were accessible.<sup>36</sup> We have discussed what texts were published and therefore available to the buyers. However, texts that were available on the library shelves were equally important for shaping the notion of American literature.

Library is a major institution for the distribution of texts. Petr Šámal in his book *Soustružníci lidských duší: Lidové knihovny a jejich cenzura na počátku padesátých let 20. století* [*The Machinists of Human Souls: Czech Public Libraries and Their Censorship in the Early 1950s*] (2009) writes that libraries during this period not only preserved values, but also were also active in the assertion of values: their role was to "educate, mobilize and shape the readership."<sup>37</sup> In this view, librarians (gatekeepers on a lower level) were seen as "soldiers in the first combat line who ensured the reader did not come into contact with potential danger lurking on the shelves."<sup>38</sup>

In practice, there were several ways to fight this battle. First, purging libraries of objectionable books and second, the arrangement of the books in the library itself: similarly to publishing politics, the aim was to limit free choice. The third method was perhaps the most extreme attempt to intervene between the reader and the book: collective, directed reading aloud. As Šámal claims,

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34. Škvorecký, 189.

35. Bouček, *Trubadúři nenávisti*, 9.

36. Jiřina Šmejkalová, *Kniha: k teorii a praxi knižní kultury* (Brno: Host, 2000), 105.

37. "vychovávat, mobilizovat a tvarovat čtenářskou obec" Šámal, 136.

38. "Jako vojáci nasazení do první bojové linie se měli postarat o to, aby se čtenář nedostal do kontaktu s potenciálním nebezpečím číhajícím v knižních regálech." Šámal, 9.

The result of the directed reading should have been the unification of the readership that was not only supposed to read the same texts, but to treat them in the same way and derive the same meaning from them.<sup>39</sup>

How did this system work for translations of American writers published before, or even shortly after, February 1949? The changes were gradual: for example, the works of Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos and John Steinbeck were at first supposed to be put into depository, and to be borrowed only on special requests.<sup>40</sup> However, the number of objectionable writers quickly grew, and the regime needed to take more drastic precautions. Lists of books to be put in the depository turned into the lists of banned books.

The lists of banned books also include reasons for their banning, given in keywords. The usual reasons for the objections were the aesthetic quality (often connected to a specific genre), formal aspects and the political stance of their authors. These categories were, of course, all ideologically charged. Some of the labels imposed on the works seem inaccurate from today's perspective: Willa Cather's works, for example, were put under the category of "escapist literature."<sup>41</sup> Any formal experiments were viewed with suspicion.<sup>42</sup> This affected for example William Saroyan's books, which were labeled "formalist" (umbrella term for modernist tendencies)<sup>43</sup> and, similarly, Steinbeck's *The Wayward Bus* (1947) and *The Moon is Down* (1942), as they allegedly demonstrated "author's turn to formalism."<sup>44</sup>

Although morality was often given as the reason for condemning specific works. For example, *Light in August* and *Sanctuary*, the only books by William Faulkner that had been previously published in Czechoslovakia, were condemned as "decadent, morally defective literature."<sup>45</sup> Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, published in Czech already in 1938, and shortly after officially banned as pornography,<sup>46</sup> was now condemned on the ground of being "existentialist."<sup>47</sup> "Cosmopolitan" was

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39. "Výsledkem řízeného čtení mělo být sjednocení publika, jež mělo nejen číst stejné texty, ale také s nimi shodně nakládat a čerpat z nich tytéž významy." Šámal, 110.

40. Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, on the other hand, could initially be displayed "free selection" in the library. This was one of the few exceptions where there was difference between individual works of one author: usually, once an author was condemned, so were all his works. Šámal, 211. Šámal, 69.

41. "úniková literatura" Šámal, 250.

42. This is a prime example of Cold War isomorphism. The particular mechanisms of this crusade in the West are described by Alan Filreis in relation to poetry in his book *Counter-revolution of the Word: The Conservative Attack on Modern Poetry, 1945–1960* (2008).

43. Šámal, 400.

44. "autorův obrat k formalismu" Šámal, 426.

45. "dekadentní morálně závadná literatura" Šámal, 275.

46. Šámal, 84.

47. Šámal, 374.

another denouncing keyword (given for example to Hemingway). Finally, authors who publicly opposed the Soviet Union or the CPUSA were seen as “politically defective.”<sup>48</sup> A prime example was Richard Wright and later also John Dos Passos and Upton Sinclair.<sup>49</sup>

After removing the books from where the public could reach them was only the first step. Under the pretext of the need of more space and paper, some of the texts were also destroyed (in lot of the cases, these were detective and adventurous stories).<sup>50</sup> However, physical destruction was often not needed. Silence, surrounding these texts did the job. The regime dealt with undesirable text not by confronting them in “an open, public, critical dispute, but rather by isolating them completely from the public discourse and condemning them to solitude.”<sup>51</sup> Zelinský uses Sylvie Richterová’s term “semiotic death” to describe how issues which vanish from the discourse often vanish completely: authors and their works are then “unscrupulously excluded from the historical process.”<sup>52</sup>

This fate, of course, met only a segment of American writing. In the early years of the new regime, there was a relatively high number of books by American authors published.<sup>53</sup> However, as the publishing scene was increasingly controlled, the list of permissible American writers shrank drastically.<sup>54</sup> Authors from the 19<sup>th</sup>

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48. “politicky závadné” Šámal, 461.

49. “autorův postoj k táboru míru” Šámal, 418. Šámal, 256.

50. This phenomenon is described in Pavel Janáček’s book *Literární brak Operace vyloučení, operace nahrazení, 1938–1951* [*Literary Pulp: Operation Expulsion, Operation Replacement, 1938–1951*] (2004).

51. Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, 170.

52. “[Tito autoři a díla] se bez skrupulí z historického procesu vyřadí.” Zelinský, 38.

53. In the early years after the *coup d’état*, there was still some continuity with the pre-war and early post-war literary scene. John Steinbeck, Upton Sinclair and Sinclair Lewis were all very popular in Czechoslovakia: however, publication of their books ceased shortly after the nationalisation of book industry and they had to wait until the 1960s to be published again.

54. For example, in 1948, the publishing house Práce [Work], publishing house of the national trade union, published translations of Lilian Smith’s *Strange Fruit* (1944), William Saroyan’s *The Human Comedy* (1943), John O’Hara *Appointment in Samarra* (1934), Betty Smith’s *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943), Pearl S. Buck’s *The Good Earth* (1931), Joan Lowell’s *A Cradle of the Deep* (1929), John Dickinson Carr *The Problem of the Wire Cage* (a detective story from 1939), and interestingly, six books from Upton Sinclair’s Lanny Budd series: *World’s End* (1940), *Between Two Worlds* (1941), *Dragon’s Teeth* (1942), *Wide is the Gate* (1943), *Dragon’s Harvest* (1945), *Presidential Mission* (1947). The following years, one more book by Sinclair was published, but the rest was replaced by Twain, Melville, London and Cooper, with books by Howard Fast and Albert Maltz being the only exception from “classics.” In 1953, there was only Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and in 1954 short stories by Jack London. In 1955, no American writer was published by this publishing house and in 1956, there was one work by Melville. Marcel Arbeit and Eva Vacca, *Bibliography of American Literature in Czech Translation: Books, Non-periodical Publications, Periodicals with up to Twelve Issues a Year, Samizdat and Exile Periodicals and Fanzines to 1997* (Olomouc: Votobia, 2000).

century were still published in high numbers, often with accompanying texts that stressed their place in the “progressive” canon. Of contemporary writers, the only reoccurring names after 1949 of American writers are Lloyd Brown, Albert Maltz, Howard Fast, Langston Hughes, Albert Halper and Alexander Saxton. Brown (an African American writer and activist), Maltz (one of the Hollywood Ten) and Fast were outspoken Communists and Saxton was in the CPUSA, too, if only for a short period of time. On the other hand, Hughes always denied his membership and Halper though leftist, was never associated with the Party.

Of these writers, it was Howard Fast who became the champion of this parallel canon, with his unchallengeable 35 works (of prose, drama and literary criticism) published in this period. Langston Hughes, on the other hand, was the voice of American poetry (also, his short story collection *The Ways of White Folks* was translated and published in 1951). Fast was a Communist, Hughes leftist African American (as Edward Taborsky claims, “The exploitation of America’s racial problem has been a recurrent feature of Czechoslovak propaganda”<sup>55</sup>). It would be easy to draw the conclusion that it was their political conviction that was the reason for them being chosen as the representatives of American literature, and dismiss them on these grounds. However, this would be a simplistic vision of cultural politics in the 1950s and of Cold War dynamics in general. As Edward Said reminds us, we should not treat literature as a “subsidiary form of class, ideology, or interest.”<sup>56</sup>

We must, therefore, look closely at the texts themselves and also at their authors. If they participated in the republic of leftist letters, what did it imply for their reception in the US? What was the cultural mechanics of a time when writers questioned by the committee for *un-American* activities, are on the other side of Iron Curtain taken as the representatives of America? How do they imagine America in their works and how does their notion fit into, and shapes the notion of American literature and more broadly, America in general?

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55. Edward Taborsky, *Communism in Czechoslovakia, 1948–1960* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1961), 499.

56. Said, 73.

## Chapter 3: The Languages of Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes was a great fit for Czechoslovak publishing politics. He was the voice of the America of the oppressed. His poetry thematized racial and social injustice in the United States. He publicly celebrated Stalin and the Soviet Union. The poems published in Czechoslovakia during the 1950s are the poems that are mostly overlooked in the canon of Hughes's work today, recalled by readers only with embarrassment as his young imprudence. Some have not been published in the United States at all. Looking at the Czechoslovak Hughes will illuminate not only contemporaneous publishing politics, but also provide us with a new perspective on his work.

To suggest that poetry might gain from a transnational reading might seem wrong-headed. It is poetry, more than any other art, that has always been perceived as an expression of something local or, indeed, national. As Jahan Ramazani claims, "Poetry criticism has often defined writers as 'essentially American' or 'Scottish' or 'Irish,' assigning each to a closed, organic group of traits and behaviors in accordance with early anthropological models of culture."<sup>1</sup> If poets express the essence of a specific nation or a specific culture, their poetry must be inspired by and must come from the lineage of other poets of the same affiliation: Ramazani calls it "the usual dynastic of narratives compatriot X begetting compatriot Y begetting compatriot Z."<sup>2</sup>

Poetry becomes the flagship of the imagined literatures. As Ramazani writes about American poetry, "some poets are born to Americanness, some achieve Americanness, some have Americanness thrust upon them."<sup>3</sup> But, as we have discussed in the previous chapters, national canons are not only formed by inclusion, but also exclusion. It is this exclusion that prompts poets like Langston Hughes to write "I, too, sing America."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 28.

2. Ramazani, 25.

3. Ramazani, 37.

4. Langston Hughes, "I, Too," *The Collected Poems by Langston Hughes*, eds Arnold Rampersad, David Roessel (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 46.



Poetry itself, however, does not stay within such borders. Hughes himself was inclusive in his poetry, writing about Lenin, Spain and Harlem, employing both Whitman and African American blues to do so. Moreover, he also translated poetry from Spanish and French and widely corresponded with other poets all around the world. Apart from being inspired by other traditions, he also widely influenced poets from different countries. Therefore, Hughes can be read, and has been read, as a part of much wider tradition than only the American canon.

Hughes's case is hardly untypical among poets and writers. This only confirms the need for a transnational perspective which, in the words of Ramazani, "helps us to understand a world in which cultural boundaries are permeable and to read ourselves as imaginative citizens of world that ceaselessly overlap, intersect, and converge."<sup>5</sup> However, the fact that cultural boundaries are permeable does not imply that the physical borders of nations and power blocs do not play a significant role. A poet does not need to be as political as Hughes to be read through lenses shaped by politics. For Hughes, the Cold War framework shaped his reception both inside and outside the United States.

#### **4.1 Native Son**

Nowadays, Hughes must hardly plead for his place in American poetry: his poems can be found in anthologies, school curricula and even motivational books. However, he was famously labeled "the most abused poet in America" by Lindsay Patterson.<sup>6</sup> Although her article on Hughes came out in 1969, the situation has not changed profoundly since then: only in recent years have scholars called for a more complex reading of Hughes. The previous readings often focus dominantly on Hughes's life: Harold Bloom, for example, writes that it was the poet's life that is his "great literary achievement," in contrast to what he perceives as "rather faded verse."<sup>7</sup> Bloom's opinion of Hughes is predictable: underlining his judgment is his wider resentment towards any form of multiculturalism. But such perspectives prevented even less prejudiced critics from fully appreciating Hughes outside the "Negro Bard" category. As Sandra Y. Govan claims, Hughes "may well be listed on an anthology's table of

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5. Ramazani, 49.

6. Lindsay Patterson, "Langston Hughes—The Most Abused Poet in America?" *The New York Times*, June 29, 1969, accessed May 5, 2016.

7. Harold Bloom, introduction to *Langston Hughes*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 2.

contents, but typically he is grouped together with other African American writers as a member of the Harlem Renaissance... rarely is he discussed critically as a participant in the modernist movement.”<sup>8</sup>

Apart from the uneasy coalition of African Americans and the American Left (as James Edward Smethurst claims, in literature, the African American intellectuals were “identified with the folk”<sup>9</sup> within the Left movement which also influences the image of Hughes as a folksy poet), originating in the 1920s, it was Cold War cultural politics that shaped the reception of Hughes. As Mary L. Dudziak stresses in her book on *Cold War Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (2011), in the early Cold War, any social critique was equated with communism.<sup>10</sup> However, Hughes faced the accusation of communism even sooner: As Mary Helen Washington writes “Hoover decided Langston Hughes’s poems were ‘communistic,’ the bureau put him on its list as far back as 1925, even though its own informants said Hughes was not a communist.”<sup>11</sup> Post-war anticommunist hysteria brought these accusations back: Alan Filreis writes that Hughes was exposed as a communist in 1948 and, consequently, “*Not without Laughter* and *Fields of Wonder* were later removed from the shelves of 150 State Department-sponsored libraries in sixty-three countries.”<sup>12</sup> In 1953, Hughes was summoned before the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations led by Senator Joseph McCarthy.

As Cary Nelson explains, “People become politically vulnerable in part because of how they are or are not valued by a variety of cultural institutions.”<sup>13</sup> This stands also for Hughes: in the early 1950s, his cultural capital in the US was very low. His poems were poorly reviewed or not reviewed at all. This was, of course, framed as an aesthetic, not political decision. Nelson describes the situation in academia at that time:

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8. Sandra Y. Govan, “The Paradox of Modernism in *The Ways of White Folks*,” in *Montage of a Dream: The Art and Life of Langston Hughes*, eds John Edgar Tidwell and Cheryl R. Ragar (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2007), 149.

9. James Edward Smethurst, *The New Red Negro: The Literary Left and African American Poetry, 1930–1946* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 185.

10. Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2011), 11.

11. Mary Helen Washington, *The Other Blacklist: the American Literary and Cultural Left of the 1950s* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 2014), 26.

12. Alan Filreis, *Counter-Revolution of the Word: The Conservative Attack on Modern Poetry 1945–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 22.

13. Cary Nelson, *Revolutionary Memory: Recovering the Poetry of the American Left* (London: Routledge, 2003), 68.

It was a period of nationwide inquisition and fear. [...] The literature professorate protected itself by a theoretical severing of poetry and politics and by a ruthless—sometimes condescending, sometimes frightened—purging of its and our historical melody.<sup>14</sup>

According to Nelson, the problem is that academia (including him) remained “trapped within that ideology and that impoverished memory for more than thirty years. But we ceased to see it as an ideology and instead lived it as one, as a self-evident fact of nature.”<sup>15</sup> What was originally a view determined by the historical situation became an integral part of the cultural narrative. In this case, the depoliticized canon of modernism is, according to Nelson, “discipline’s testimony before HUAC.”<sup>16</sup> This testimony later became internalized and repeated.

Other contexts have been influenced by different testimonies, and this holds especially true for the 1950s when both power blocs had been the most repressive. How does Hughes’s poetry change if we trace the journey of his poems across the Atlantic Ocean and the Iron Curtain? Vera M. Kutzinsky deals with similar issue, but she reads Hughes from the perspective of Latin America. The questions she asks, however, are also applicable for this transatlantic journey: “Why were certain Hughes poems translated and not others? How were they translated? What images of Hughes did different translators construct for their readers?”<sup>17</sup>

## 4.2 Translating Hughes

The first post-war collection of works by Langston Hughes in Czechoslovakia was published in 1950 and it was called *O America zpívám* [*I Sing of America*]. The collection was the work of three translators: Jaroslav Bouček, Zbyněk Kožnar a Jan Štern. Štern presents an interesting example of the ironic fates of the Central European intellectuals. In the 1950s, however, he was a convinced Stalinist whose writing helped to condemn many writers. Apart from occasional translations of poetry from English, Zbyněk Kožnar, the second of the trio, wrote reportage books. The soul of this project was Jaroslav Bouček, discussed in the previous chapter, the author of the afterword and editor of the collection.

The choice of individual poems was also significant. In this collection, Bouček selected poems that were later published over and over again in anthologies, such as

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14. Nelson, 68.

15. Nelson, 68.

16. Nelson, 68.

17. Vera M. Kutzinsky, *The Worlds of Langston Hughes. Modernism and Translation in the Americas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 4.

*Hlasy básníků bojujících na západě* [*The Voices of Fighters Fighting in the West*] which came out a year later, or *Poesie zbraň pravdy. Básníci světa v boji za mír a socialismus* [*Poetry, a Weapon of Truth: The Poets of the World Fighting for Peace and Socialism*] (1953), and so shaped Hughes's reception for a whole generation.

The name of the collection was probably inspired by the final poem "I, Too" ("I, Too, Sing America"). The whole collection is divided into four parts: *Blues*, *Černý muž hovoří* [*The Black Man Speaks*], *Dobrý den, Revoluce* [*Hello Revolution*], *Ať opět Amerika Amerikou je* [*Let America be America Again*]. Here, the focus is on the last part of the collection. Its name, together with the name of the whole collection, demonstrates that Hughes was supposed to represent not only American poetry, but also America as such.

The problem of America as it is presented in this collection is that the subtle irony of Hughes's vision goes almost unnoticed (or unacknowledged). This is clearly visible in the poem Bouček called "perhaps the most beautiful poem of today's proletarian American poetry,"<sup>18</sup> "Let America Be America Again." This poem can hardly be categorized as a neglected poem in context of Hughes's works. Arnold Rampersad labels it "an example of most radical poems ever published by an American, as well as some of the most poignant lamentations of the chasm that often exists between American social ideals and American social reality."<sup>19</sup> Martin Luther King used parts of this poem in his famous "I Have a Dream" speech and the title was also used by Democratic senator John Kerry in his 2004 presidential campaign. In Czechoslovakia, apart from this collection, the poem was published in five other anthologies between 1950 and 1963.<sup>20</sup>

The translation of the poem (by Jan Štern) makes slight shifts in meaning. The expressivity of the middle part is significantly toned down, as in the case of a chain "of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!/Of grab the gold!"<sup>21</sup> In the poem, Hughes piles up outcries that are translated as attributes: "řetězem bez konce, řetězem zisků"

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18. "snad nejkrásnější básně, jakou vydala současná pokroková poezie Ameriky" Jaroslav Bouček, afterword to *O America zpívám*, ed. Jaroslav Bouček (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1950), 87.

19. Arnold Rampersad, introduction to *The Collected Poems by Langston Hughes*, eds Arnold Rampersad, David Roessel (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 4.

20. Apart from the previously mentioned anthologies, the poem also appears in *Černoch si zpívá Blues* [*The Black Man Sings the Blues*] from 1957 and 1963 *Harlemský zpěvník* [*Harlem Songbook*].

21. Langston Hughes, "Let America be America Again," in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, eds Arnold Rampersad, David Roessel), 190.

(“the chain without an end, the chain of profits”).<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere, two stanzas of the poem are merged into one.

There are more shifts in this poem that cannot be explained simply by the translator’s poetic license. Hughes’s “plow” is replaced by “tractor” which better fits the context of Czech poetry at that time. The next change was probably due to misunderstanding: “The rape and rot of graft” is translated as “hniloba roubů,” the problem is that instead of “graft” in a sense of bribery, the translator chose a word used for grafting branches.

Seemingly, this poem contributes to the idea of America as a failed Promised Land. As such, it was used by Kerry both in his campaign and in his speech at the fiftieth anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. As John Edward Tidwell and Cheryl R. Ragar write, the senator’s use of the poem “made these words evoke a sense of patriotism, national unity, and civic duty. In true democratic fashion, his speech urged a return to the highest values of citizenship, such as those purportedly experienced in the 1990s.”<sup>23</sup> Hughes, however, does not recall any golden age. The irony of the poem is that such times never existed: the pioneers are counterbalanced with “red man driven from the land,” Hughes’s ironizes the whole notion of the American Dream, directly targeting what Jonathan Scott calls “the Jeffersonian platitudes.”<sup>24</sup> As Tidwell and Ragar claim,

While Kerry sought to reinscribe a belief in what he felt were generally accepted political ideals, Hughes actually had issued a call for establishing those ideals. From his privileged social station, Kerry assumed a humanity for all Americans, including African Americans. But from his origins in the imprimatur of Jim Crow, Hughes used his poem to argue for the inclusion of a people whose very humanity had been denied. Kerry, therefore, called for a return to noble ideals, while Hughes cried out for an experience that most African Americans never had.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly to Kerry’s use of the poem, the translation also neglects Hughes’s problematisation of the dream itself: “Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed” was translated as “Ať je zas snem, o kterém snílci snili” (59). The difference is in the short word, perhaps added because of rhythm: “zas,” “again”: “Let

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22. Langston Hughes, “Ať Amerika opět Amerikou je,” in *O Americe zpívám*, ed. Jaroslav Bouček (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1950), 61. All subsequent references to this collection are cited in the text.

23. John Edward Tidwell, Cheryl R. Ragar, “The Paradox of Modernism in *The Ways of White Folks*,” in *Montage of a Dream: The Art and Life of Langston Hughes*, eds John Edgar Tidwell and Cheryl R. Ragar (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2007), 14.

24. Jonathan Scott, *Socialist Joy in the Writing of Langston Hughes* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 90.

25. Tidwell, Ragar, 14.

America be the dream the dreamers dreamed *again*” profoundly changes the meaning as it hints that there was no time, in however distant the past, that the dream was realized. It is the image of the “the self-made, democracy-loving, freedom-seeking American immigrant pioneer” from which, according to Scott, the African American is derived as the “Other.”<sup>26</sup>

The next poem is called “The Freedom Train,” “Vlak svobody.” Curiously, the account of the poem in Rampersad’s collection is as follows:

The poem was written in response to a plan by the American Heritage Foundation to send the original text of the Declaration of Independence around the country on a special train. The tour never took place.<sup>27</sup> However, the Freedom Train was more than real, with its official song, licensed paraphernalia and crowds which welcomed it on each of its stations. The historical circumstances of the poem are worth mentioning here, as the poem was written as a response to a specific historical situation which it, in its afterlife, helped to change. A record of “Freedom Train” was made by Paul Robeson and, as Laurie B. Green writes, it “ensured that the poem’s travels paralleled those of the exhibition.”<sup>28</sup> Hughes’s poem was one of the critical voices under which influence the American Heritage Foundation finally proclaimed the train unsegregated, causing problems with some Southern states’ officials. The train eventually did not stop in Memphis and Birmingham as the cities announced that the waiting lines would be segregated and, as Richard M. Fried writes, the whole tour was actually understood as a triumph of desegregation.<sup>29</sup> Although, of course, the tour was self-congratulatory propaganda, intended to “sell[] America to Americans”<sup>30</sup> (and the emotions it stirred were later used for other purposes as the Freedom Fond), Bouček’s afterword does not mention the controversy, and simply states that the Freedom Train was a “hypocritical farce.”<sup>31</sup>

The major trait of the translation of this poem by Zbyněk Kožnar is the leveling out of the language. For example, where Hughes writes “Cause freedom

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26. Scott, *Socialist Joy*, 88–89.

27. “Notes to the Poems” in *The Collected Poems by Langston Hughes*, eds Arnold Rampersad, David Roessel (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 8.

28. Laurie B. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 120.

29. Richard M. Fried, *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming! Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 121.

30. Fried, 121.

31. “pokrytecká komedie” Bouček, afterword, 88.

ain't freedom when a man ain't free,"<sup>32</sup> the translator uses neutral, perhaps even a bit elevated "to není svoboda, když člověk není svobodnen" (64). While Czech lack certain means (Hughes often uses contracted forms), the translator did not compensate for this, deciding on standard Czech even when other means were available (adjective suffixes, for instance). It is necessary to admit that such leveling out would be considered standard practice at that time. However, in case of Hughes, when his racial identity was almost over-stressed by contemporary criticism, this practice directly contradicts this message, or rather, the connections between struggle against oppression and language are overlooked.

Freedom is the also the subject of the next poem, "Freedom Ride," "Cesta svobody." Marcel Arbeit mentions that the poem was considered apocryphal for a long time as poem is not to be found in any of the editions of the collected works.<sup>33</sup> It was a Dutch anthology where Arbeit managed to find the original and he also claims that Hughes often sent poems which could not be published in the US to European publishers.<sup>34</sup> However, contrary to what Arbeit claims, the poem was published in the US and it is well remembered to this day, as it is performed by various artists: the text was written as a song. The music was composed by Emerson Harper (a musician who had at that moment, as Laurie F. Leach writes, "just become the first black man in the CBS studio orchestra"<sup>35</sup>) and it was first performed in a radio broadcast in 1942 with the following commentary: "Tonight the American Negro soldier has a song of his own written by one of his own race... a song they could take into battle."<sup>36</sup> Leach elaborates on Hughes's motivation for writing it:

Hughes was not paid for these written contributions to the war effort nor for various broadcasts he made, so he began trying his hand at songwriting in hopes of writing a popular hit that would make him financially successful.<sup>37</sup> The song indeed became popular and it is often attributed to Josh White who was its first performer.

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32. Langston Hughes, "Freedom Train," in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, eds Arnold Rampersand, David Roessel), 324.

33. Marcel Arbeit. "Adoptivní syn české literatury – Afroameričan Langston Hughes," in: *Otázky českého kánonu. Sborník příspěvků z III. kongresu světové literárněvědné bohemistiky*, ed. Stanislava Fedrová (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2006), 431.

34. Arbeit, 431.

35. Laurie F. Leach, *Langston Hughes. A Biography* (London: Greenwood Press, 2004), 112.

36. Langston Hughes, "Freedom Train," in *Collected Works of Langston Hughes, Vol 6: Gospel Plays, Operas, and Later Dramatic Works*.ed. Leslie Catherine Sanders. (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2004), 626.

37. Leach, 112.

The confusions about the title of the poem are visible already in the collection. Bouček claims it was named after a “famous novel by Howard Fast,”<sup>38</sup> *Freedom Road* (1944). This could be seen as an attempt to interconnect the suitable (Left) American writes and strengthen Fast’s image as an unchallenged literary authority (in contrast to Hughes who was seen as less ideologically dependable). However, apart from the difference of the original title of the poem (“Freedom Ride”), Hughes’s poem also appeared two years prior to the novel, so he could not have been inspired by Fast in naming of the song.

In the US, the song appeared with many additional lines and alternatives. However, lines like “Mighty Russia as our friend,” translated by Kožnar as “jako přítele Sovětský svaz” (“Soviet Union as a friend”) (66) does not appear in any later song versions. The genre and form of the poem (regular rhymes and refrain) obviously suited the translator better than Hughes’s more poetic texts. However, the leveling out of language is prominent also here and the translator also treats stanzaic units in a cavalier fashion.

The same phenomena can be seen in the following poem, “Democracy”<sup>39</sup>—“Demokracie,” also translated by Kožnar. The last stanza of the poem, as originally published in *One Way Ticket*, reads:

Freedom  
Is a strong seed  
Planted  
In a great need.  
I live here, too.  
I want freedom  
Just as you.<sup>40</sup>

Even graphically, the stanza is divided from the rest of the poem (it is placed in the middle of the page) as a concluding exclamation. In the translation, it is divided into two neat stanzas which are not distinguished from the rest of the poem:

Svoboda –  
ta může vykvést  
jenom ze semene, vsazeného  
při velkém neštěstí.

Žiji tu s vámi –  
a vaše svoboda  
ta dosud scházívá mi. (68)

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38. Bouček, afterword, 88.

39. Hughes later changed the title of the poem to “Freedom.”

40. Langston Hughes. “Democracy,” in *One-Way Ticket* (New York: A. Kopf, 1949), 87.



Moreover, there is a shift in meaning in the second stanza. The translator attempted to apply the reality of a 1950s nationalized Czechoslovak on Hughes's poem. Where Hughes claims "I have as much right/As the other fellow has/To stand/On my two feet/ And own land,"<sup>41</sup> the translator changed the potentially subversive landowning to "být podílníkem státu": "I have the right to be a shareholder of the state" (69).

The first translation by Jaroslav Bouček is "Balada pro Američany," "Ballad for Americans." Arbeit writes that its existence in other sources, either in Czech or in English cannot be confirmed and if Hughes was not the author, then it was somebody who had perfectly adopted Hughes's style.<sup>42</sup> Here, once more, specification is needed on both points of this claim. Bouček accurately mentions in the afterword that the text was recorded by Paul Robeson. The song became a hit: as Paul Von Blum writes, it was even used at 1940 Republican party convention.<sup>43</sup> Its over-enthusiastic and sentimental mode, alluding to various personas of American history, resonated with contemporary audience in America and obviously also with the Czechoslovak translators. However, Hughes was not the author: the song was written by John Latouche and Earl Robinson and the original title was "Ballad for Uncle Sam."<sup>44</sup> Nor does it really resemble Hughes's poems: it lacks the irony and the problematisation of the American dream present in other of Hughes's texts:

Our country's strong, our country's young,  
And her greatest songs are still unsung.  
From her plains and mountains we have sprung,  
To keep the faith with those who went before.<sup>45</sup>

"Dear Mr. President" is another poem translated by Bouček, under the name "Vážený p. president."<sup>46</sup> The poem juxtaposes African Americans' limited freedoms with their duty to go to war. Perhaps it is again due to its more traditional form, but Bouček seems to capture Hughes's original more precisely. The only shift is the use of a general term "president" where Hughes addresses Roosevelt.

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41. Ibid.

42. Arbeit, 430.

43. Paul Von Blum, *Paul Robeson For Beginners* (Danbury: For Beginners, 2013), 67.

44. Ibid.

45. John LaTouche, "Ballad For Americans," accessed March 24, 2016.

46. In the section on Hughes in Arbeit's and Vacca's *Bibliography of American Literature in Czech Translation*, the poem "Message to the President" is stated as the original title. This is, however, a different poem by Hughes. Arbeit, Vacca, 766.

The poem which closes this section, “I, Too,” is among the mostly anthologized poems by Hughes, both in the American and Czechoslovak contexts. Arbeit lists five translations in various anthologies since 1933<sup>47</sup> and even more appeared in various journals and magazines. The poem itself enters a dialogue with Whitman’s “I Hear America Singing.” Grammatically, Hughes makes America not the singing subject of Whitman’s poem, but the object of the sentence and it is a direct object, without any preposition. The title and at the same key sentence became the main problem of the translation: each translator presented a different version, but nobody dared to use Hughes’s grammatically incorrect structure. Here, Kožnař used “Já take zpívám za Ameriku” (“I, Too Sing For America”).

The translation shares similar features with other translations in this section. Firstly, it subscribes more to Whitman’s vision of pluralistic America than the threat present in Hughes’s poem:

Tomorrow,  
I’ll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody’ll dare  
Say to me,  
“Eat in the kitchen,”  
Then.<sup>48</sup>

The threat is suppressed by adding rhymes. The speaker of the poem, when the company comes and he is not allowed to eat with them, claims: “But I laugh/ And eat well/ And grew strong.”<sup>49</sup> In translation, the speaker’s reaction is that he finds it laughable and he is without anger: “Je mi to k smíchu a nemám zlost” (78). Here, the translator rhymed the second and the fourth line (“společnost/zlost”).

The image of Hughes, created through these translations, is optimistic. Hughes’s African-American speaker in his Czechoslovak version is hopeful rather than angry and, importantly, he speaks the language of the books, not of the streets. This picture was in a direct contrast to the translations Czechoslovak readership had known from the pre-war years.

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47. Ibid.

48. Langston Hughes, “I, Too,” in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, eds Arnold Rampersand, David Roessel), 46.

49. Ibid.

### 4.3 Adopted Son

In Czechoslovakia, Hughes was already a well-known poet. The first translations into Czech appeared in 1928 (only two years after Hughes's first poetry collection, *The Weary Blues* was published). Marcel Arbeit called Hughes the "adopted son of Czech literature"<sup>50</sup> in his eponymous article (2006). This adoption was especially prominent when Hughes was disinherited by his motherland. Between 1948 and 1953, the years when his political troubles in the United States escalated, he was the only living American poet whose collection was published between 1948 and 1953 in Czechoslovakia.<sup>51</sup>

Before the war, Hughes was glorified by Czech poetists as a formal experimentalist.<sup>52</sup> This aspect of his work did not suit the contemporaneous norm. In *O America zpívám*, Hughes is presented in a different light. As Arbeit claims,

Although in these years, pamphlet poetry comprised only a negligible share of [Hughes's] poetry, here [in Czechoslovakia] Hughes was presented, in accordance with what the times demanded, exclusively as a revolutionary and military campaigner.<sup>53</sup>

Arbeit underlines an important point: the majority of the poems published in this volume were written in the 1930s or early 1940s, the period when Hughes wrote his most radical poems. Arbeit, however, joins the American critics who dismissed Hughes's writing from this period as "pamphlet poetry." As Smethurst writes,

No portion of Hughes's literary career has been more commonly dismissed than that of the 1930s. Even many of Hughes's admirers compare unfavorably his writings of the 1930s to his work in other decades. In this view, Hughes's 1930s efforts in many different genres—including short and long fiction, poetry, drama, reportage, song writing—largely sounded over and over the same ham-fisted didactic note, lacking the lyric humanism and folk wit of his work in the 1920s, 1940s, and 1950s.<sup>54</sup>

Hughes presented in *O America zpívám* is the revolutionary, 1930s Hughes.

Although this directly contrasts with the American critical consensus described by

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50. Arbeit, 424.

51. Arbeit, 429. Hughes's popularity prevailed even after the gradual changes in the official discourse. With a new generations of translators of Hughes, most dominantly Jiří Valja, Josef Škvorecký and Lubomír Dorůžka (the same translators responsible also for "selling" other American authors as Faulkner), Hughes's role as the African American engaged poet was still stressed, but this time to a different objective. The new translators, editors and critics attempted to interpret poems and poets in a way that would not only suit the target culture, but also help to modify it. By using the trope of the poet of the oppressed nation, they managed to "smuggle in" Hughes and other poets and also the jazz poetry, which had a significant influence upon the next generation of Czechoslovak poets.

52. Arbeit, 425.

53. "přestože v těchto letech tvořila pamfletická poezie už jen mizivé procento jeho tvorby, u nás byl Hughes představován v souladu s potřebou doby výhradně jako revolucionář a militantní bojovník." Arbeit, 430.

54. Smethurst, 93.

Smethurst, some of the conclusions are similar. Hughes was not accorded his rightful place in the canon of literary modernism, as this canon was conceived of as apolitical. In Czechoslovakia, his poetry is by translation directed towards “demodernized” canon of political poetry.

This interpretation clearly did not correspond to the pre-war interpretation of Hughes in Czechoslovakia. In order to address this discrepancy Bouček introduces the story of progress and redemption in his afterword. Hughes’s modernism is seen as an unfortunate side effect of the difficult situation of African Americans. Allegedly, the poet, after maturing both personally and poetically, rejected “oinking of the saxophone and jingling of the bottles of gin” in favor of “honest and plain lyric.”<sup>55</sup>

The demand for this type of poetry must be seen in the context of Czech poetry of that time. In the official discourse, vernacular language made its re-appearance first in the second half of the 1950s with the group around the magazine *Květen* [May]. The official poetry of the first half of this decade was strongly influenced by the new aesthetic norms. The poet’s task was to build the new socialistic society: his poetry was supposed to be for the masses, comprehensible, appellative, didactic.<sup>56</sup> Formally, this poetry used models from the 19<sup>th</sup> century folk-inspired poetry. As Macura writes, the simplified rhythmical schemas of the national classics replaced the pre-war formal experiments.<sup>57</sup> This meant regular rhythm and end rhymes.<sup>58</sup>

Hughes’s poetry was carefully selected and translated in order to fit these norms. These appropriations, however, undermined the ultimate reason why he was chosen to represent America in the first place. Hughes, in his personality and poetry, embodied what Dudziak calls America’s “Achilles heel”<sup>59</sup> of the time. The situation of African Americans in the US was internationally criticized and it became a powerful tool in the hands of the Soviet Union. As Dudziak claims, “by 1949 race in America was a principal Soviet propaganda theme.”<sup>60</sup> Also in Czechoslovakia, the racial injustice in the US was widely covered by the media and often publicly

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55. “kvikání saxofonu a cinkot lahví s ginem,” “upřímnou a prostou lyrikou” Bouček, afterword, 89.

56. “Poezie jako výraz oficiální ideologie,” in *Dějiny české literatury 1945–1989, II, 1948–1958*, eds Pavel Janoušek et al. (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2006), 133.

57. Macura, 63.

58. “Básníci časopisu Květen,” in *Dějiny české literatury 1945–1989, II, 1948–1958*, eds Pavel Janoušek et al. (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2006), 188.

59. Dudziak, 29.

60. Dudziak, 15.

commented upon. Despite the fact that Hughes's race was frequently stressed, his blackness was acknowledged only in the terms of social protest, not to a specific aesthetic or language. And language is crucial here: Hughes was famous for his use of black vernacular, what Scott calls "assertion of literary blackness."<sup>61</sup> After all, in the Leninist view, the struggle of African Americans for self-determination was a national struggle. In this struggle, new language is needed: however, in the Czechoslovak context of the 1950s, Hughes was denied this language.

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61. Scott, *Socialist Joy*, 51.

## Chapter 4: Howard Fast, the Voice of America

“We can hardly wish our young generation to have a better narrator of America than Howard Fast,” writes Zdeněk Stříbrný in his short critical piece on the writer.<sup>1</sup> And Howard Fast really became the narrator of America, if only because other voices were barely been heard in Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1956. If Langston Hughes was the adopted son, Fast was the beloved only child. However, because he was so forcibly propagated by official structures, the development of his reception is different from Hughes’s: while Hughes was picked up by later generations, Fast became the synonym for cultural oppression and none of his books was published again until late 1994.

Fast may be seen as an example of Cold War mechanisms, where, in the area of Soviet influence, being Red meant being read. If the narrative of American criticism up to about a decade ago is accepted, his works are non-literature, mere propaganda that does not deserve to be read precisely because it was so praised by the literary critics of the Soviet bloc. However, as Djagalov claims, Fast was not a Soviet invention, as the older generation of Slavists might seem to claim: “Moscow did not, and could not, invent Howard Fast’s status as one of America’s most popular contemporary writers.”<sup>2</sup>

Fast was enormously popular. If we dismiss this simply as a result of his political orientation and heavy Soviet propaganda (which was undoubtedly also a factor), there is still his immense popularity among readers of the Western bloc. Ironically, this popularity was also supported by the official endorsement of Fast’s books by the US government before he fell out of favor for his outspoken Communism.

Although Fast sold millions copies of his books worldwide, it is only recently that scholars such as Alan Wald, Rossen Djagalov, Lily Phillips and Philip Deery began to revisit his life and works. Fast’s popularity in the Soviet area was

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1. “Těžko můžeme přát naší mladé generaci lepšího vypravěče o Americe, než je Howard Fast.” Zdeněk Stříbrný, *Howard Fast, průkopník socialistického realismu v USA* (Prague: Orbis, 1953), 7.  
2. Djagalov, 40.

constructed to a great extent: he was the one of the few living American authors who were translated and reviewed and certainly the only one who was accepted without any objections. The above mentioned scholars examine this popularity and critically engage directly with Fast's works. In the Cold War context, however, the Fast phenomenon poses important questions: Why was Fast so suitable to present America to a Communist audience? What in his vision of America was so appealing that he got a literary visa when so many others did not? What image of Fast was created by translation?

The case of Howard Fast might help us to understand the complex web of Cold War literature and especially the method of representing America through one author. Fast's works were crucial for the reception of the enemy's culture, as they passed through the selective apparatus of cultural politics of that time, and they did so not only because their author had a Party card but also because the vision of America they offered fitted into the discursive framework of the period.

Cultural artifacts could travel where their authors could not. Fast's play *Thirty Pieces of Silver* had its world premiere in Prague and Fast could not attend as he was denied his passport. In contrast to his other works which mainly dealt with history, this play is set in contemporary America. By focusing on this work, it is possible to further illuminate how Fast's America was created, represented and translated on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain.

## 5.1 Citizen Howard Fast

Howard Fast had published his first novel in the 1930s, the radical era of American letters. However, he was not known as a Communist or leftist then, he joined the CPUSA first in 1943.<sup>3</sup> In spite of that he became, according to Alan Wald, "very much the left-wing cultural worker transforming the outlook and sensibility of prewar Communism into a more serviceable form for the postwar era."<sup>4</sup>

The postwar era was difficult for leftist writers. The aftermath of World War II brought economic prosperity and, as Lily Phillips calls it, also "the seduction of workers" by this prosperity.<sup>5</sup> A middle-class living standard was seemingly attainable by everyone. As Phillips argues, this undermined social conscience: "Why agitate for

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3. Alan M. Wald, *American Night: The Literary Left in the Era of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 7.

4. Wald, *American Night*, 7.

5. Lily Phillips, "Howard Fast and the Refashioning of Postwar Protest," *Prospects* 27 (2002), 500.

widespread changes when success seemed possible through individual effort?”<sup>6</sup> The new literature stressed “internal consciousness over social critique,” and as a result, “progressive agitation seemed beside the point.”<sup>7</sup>

Fast could reach such popularity in the US because his books also championed patriotism, awakened in Americans after their victory in World War II. In his books, Fast introduces a reinterpretation of history which serves as a social critique of the present, but he always does so with grandeur and idealization, as some of titles of his novels from the early 1950s suggest: *The Last Frontier*, *Haym Solomon: Son of Liberty*, *The Unvanquished*, *Freedom Road*, *The Proud and the Free*... As Wald writes about the last mentioned novel, the book “not only anticipated but by far outdistanced the school of ‘history-from-the-bottom-up’ that would become a hallmark of 1960s New Left scholarship.”<sup>8</sup> Fast revisited periods of American history in order to rewrite it from the perspective of marginalized groups, such as workers or African Americans. As Phillips claims, “[Fast] could not provide the missing data; what he could provide was a story that would challenge the ideology that made that happen.”<sup>9</sup>

Fast’s approach to history necessarily challenged the status quo. According to Phillips, “one’s sense of time, then, can be part of the weight that maintains the status quo, retarding change. Fast wrote historical fiction in order to change this sense of time.”<sup>10</sup> In contrast to either history, or fiction alone, this conjuncture has the force to change minds and orient “reader toward the future by enunciating the myth of progress and change. [...] The final revolution will be both completely new and at the same time a return to original ideals.”<sup>11</sup>

In Fast’s obituary in *The New York Times*, Merwyn Rothstein described his works as “always didactic to a degree, opposed to modernism, engaged in social struggle and insistent on taking sides and teaching lessons of life’s moral significance.”<sup>12</sup> This characterization resonated with Fast’s personal view of literature.

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6. Phillips, 500.

7. Phillips, 500.

8. Alan M. Wald, “Marxist Literary Resistance to the Cold War,” *Prospects* 20 (Oct 1995), 480.

9. Phillips, 494.

10. Phillips, 495.

11. Phillips, 494.

12. Merwyn Rothstein, “Howard Fast, Best-selling Novelist, Dies at 88,” *The New York Times on the Web*, March 14, 2003, accessed June 6, 2016.



As Phillips claims, “Every artistic choice Fast wrote was partisan (as, he said, ‘the truth was partisan’) and needed to be judged as a political and moral act.”<sup>13</sup>

Fast’s works were well received worldwide: not only in the Eastern and Central Europe, but also in Britain, France and Australia. However, this growing international popularity was counterbalanced by the problems he experienced at home. It crystallized in the conflict with the Board of Superintendents of New York City, which, according to Philip Deery, “recommended unanimously to the Board of Education that Howard Fast’s popular novel of the American Revolution, *Citizen Tom Paine*, be removed from all secondary schools.”<sup>14</sup> By that time, this 1943 novel had sold over a million copies and it was also distributed “to both American servicemen abroad in the *Armed Services Editions* and to citizens of liberated countries by the Office of War Information.”<sup>15</sup>

Officially, the charge brought against the novel was not its political message; it was accused of immorality. Deery records this event at lengths and he writes:

Although it is possible that the nine members of the Board of Superintendents and five of the six members of the Board of Education were sufficiently outraged by their selective reading of ‘purple’ passages of Fast’s historical novel to ban it, it is equally plausible that morality cloaked ideology. The previous year Fast had been served with a subpoena, appeared before HUAC, refused to cooperate and was cited for contempt.<sup>16</sup>

The trial with *Citizen Tom Paine* only illustrates the increasingly difficult situation for politically engaged writers in the postwar United States. Seemingly apolitical judgments were only too political for those who did not conform to the required modes of writing.

While in his memoirs, Fast often exaggerates his own importance to the FBI, it has been confirmed that his file was almost eleven hundred pages long and, according to Andrew Macdonald, cost an estimated \$10 million to compile.<sup>17</sup> His activities were closely observed, his phone tapped, he went to prison for contempt of Congress. However, there are profound differences between the prosecution of the unsuitable writers in the United States and the area controlled by the Soviet Union. In the years after Fast’s imprisonment, when no publisher wanted to publish his books, he founded

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13. Phillips, 491.

14. Philip Deery, *Red Apple: Communism and McCarthyism in Cold War* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 40.

15. Deery, 40.

16. Deery, 41.

17. Andrew Macdonald, *Howard Fast: A Critical Companion* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 1996), 21.

his own publishing company, The Blue Heron Press. This would be unthinkable in the nationalized culture of the Eastern bloc. Fast was not given a passport to attend the world premiere of his play in Prague: however, many of his Czechoslovak colleagues could not leave the country for years to come. This said, the basic mechanism of the “geography of blacklist” (Deery’s term) worked in a similar fashion on both sides of the Curtain. When Deery writes “like the airbrushing of Trotsky from Soviet photographs, Fast had disappeared from these reissued textbooks,”<sup>18</sup> he talks about the situation following hearings of Fast in front of the HUAC and the McCarthy Committee. However, he could as well be talking about the situation on the other side of the Curtain after Fast left CPUSA in February 1957.

In the year of his greatest glory, however, Fast became a powerful asset in shaping the vision of America. His revolutionary vision that combined the past with the future was the reason he was so precious to the establishment on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain: in Fast’s version of history, the American tradition was in fact a progressive tradition with a “direct kinship with the Soviets”:<sup>19</sup>

For them [Emerson, Thoreau, Bryant and Twain] there was something else, another set of standards out of which they fashioned their writing, and far closer to the present Soviet ethic than to the ethic of the Truman-Bevin coalition.<sup>20</sup>

Every interpretation of literary history constructs and nourishes certain alliances. Fast does not construct his vision in accordance with the American critical consensus of that time (which championed the national perspective), but he uses the Marxist-Leninist concept of duality of culture within each nation.

Fast held the monopoly on progressive America. Not only was he an authority on literary history, but his novels sold by the million, especially (but not only) in the area under Soviet influence. This was not caused only by the massive campaign that surrounded them: Wald, although he admits the limitations of Fast’s chosen genre, notes that he “had the ability to construct an easily absorbed but nevertheless complex plot while also outlay an area of well developed characters.”<sup>21</sup> Djagalov, on the other hand, stresses their quality against the background of domestic production: “the

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18. Deery, 42.

19. Phillips, 495.

20. Howard Fast, *Being Red* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), 104.

21. Wald, *American Night*, 96.

novels distinguished themselves against the background of the Soviet novels of the postwar period, with a mastery of suspense and fast-paced action.”<sup>22</sup>

The Soviet satellites all shared a similar love for Fast, some even sooner than the Soviet Union itself (where even during the height of Fast’s fame, some of his works were not published). The first translation into Czech, *The Last Frotnier* appeared in 1947 and 35 works by Fast were published between 1948 and 1956 (not including numerous reprints). In 1951, one of these works was a theatre play by Fast which premiered shortly before in Prague: *Thirty Pieces of Silver*.

## 5.2 Thirty Pieces of Silver: Genesis

Fast was mostly known for his novels. However, in his memoir *Being Red* (1990) he claims: “My avocation was the theater—I should say, my great love—and in between novels and newspaper work, I wrote a dozen plays.”<sup>23</sup> In the foreword to the US edition of *Thirty Pieces of Silver* (1954), Fast describes the circumstances in which he wrote this particular play:

Toward the end of 1947, a Broadway producer suggested that I write about something close and meaningful to me. He signed a contract for an option on this yet unwritten play and gave me his verbal assurances that if it had any merit whatsoever, he would produce it. Almost a year later, I handed him the first draft of *Thirty Pieces of Silver*. He read it through and dismissed it with one word—‘impossible.’<sup>24</sup>

According to Fast’s memoir, he remembered the play when New Theatre in Melbourne requested a play reflecting the contemporary situation in the US. New Theatre was soon followed by Czechoslovak Theatrical & Literary Agency which demanded *Thirty Pieces*.<sup>25</sup> Upon this occasion Fast revisited the text and “decided to do a complete rewrite, basing this new version on criticisms from Australia and the comments of various actor-friends to whom I had shown it.”<sup>26</sup> Both Fast and his first biographer, Frank Campenni, claim that the Czechoslovak premiere (the official world premiere) took place in April.<sup>27</sup> The premiere, however, took place in Prague, on March 16, 1951.

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22. Djagalov, 43.

23. Fast, *Being Red*, 158.

24. Howard Fast, introduction to *Thirty Pieces of Silver* (New York: The Blue Heron Press, 1954), 5.

25. Fast, introduction, 5.

26. Fast, introduction, 6.

27. Frank Campenni, *Citizen Howard Fast: A Critical Biography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1971), 662.

After this, further changes were made to the play. Based on the success of the play in Czechoslovakia, a theatre company in Moscow wanted to stage it also. Fast, however, sent a new version there, accompanied by a letter to Alexander Fadeyev, chairman of the Union of Soviet Writers:

I would prefer this to your obtaining the English script which was produced in Prague, since we have had additional political discussions of the play here after the play was sent to Prague and I did very considerable revision of the manuscript.<sup>28</sup>

The reason for this revision was the intervention of the CPUSA. The Party threatened Fast with expulsion if he refused to change the play (as Fast writes, this was common practice within the Party).<sup>29</sup>

According to Gerald Sorin, “what the Party objected to is impossible to determine as no copy of the original version is available.”<sup>30</sup> However, there is one version of the original play before the changes required by CPUSA had been made: the Czech version. Here, too, the play was changed: however, the changes were only applied in January 1952 for the hundredth performance,<sup>31</sup> and the text of play had already been printed by then.

In the printed version of the play, the changes are only added as an appendix. That he changed the play is presented as a proof of Fast’s excellence. In the commentary to the appendix it is stressed, that he is able to revise his own work in order to make it even more progressive.<sup>32</sup> Thus, this edition of the play provides a unique opportunity to compare three versions of the text in order to see both shifts in translation and changes made under Party pressure.

### 5.3 Fast on the Page and on the Stage

*Thirty Pieces of Silver* is a play about a young man David, employed in Washington. He lives with his wife Jane, daughter Lorry and African American servant Hilda in a comfortable suburban house. He owes his position to his friend from the war, Agronsky. However, when the anticommunist witch hunt knocks at his door, he turns against his former benefactor to save his own position. His wife, already disgusted by

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28. Letter from Howard Fast (New York) to A. Fadeyev (Moscow), March 28, 1951, in USW archive, f. 631, op. 26, d. 3378, in Phillips, 506.

29. Fast, *Naked God*, 142.

30. Gerald Sorin, *Howard Fast: Life and Literature On the Left Lane* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 233.

31. “Nová úprava Fastovy hry,” *Lidové noviny* January 23, 1952, 6.

32. “Dodatek,” in *Třicet stříbrných*, trans. Ota Ornest (Prague: Osvěta, 1952), I.

his behavior towards Hilda and his prejudices, leaves him and takes their daughter with her.

Eric Bentley puts *Thirty Pieces of Silver* in the context of other contemporary plays with similar topics. As he writes:

Communists on stage are always (a) foreigners and (b) cut out of cardboard. The feeling of being falsely accused being the archetypal sentiment of living in the twentieth century (classically imaged by Kafka), the false accusation of Communism has become the stereotype of political drama.<sup>33</sup>

David is falsely accused of being a Communist on the basis of his friendship with Agronsky (who is suspected also because of his origin, as he was born in Russia). Agronsky, however, never actually appears on the stage and it is never clear whether he belongs to the Party, or not. David is compared to Judas because he sells his friend: in order to keep his job, he signs a document stating that he had seen Agronsky's Party card, although he never did.

*Thirty Pieces of Silver* confirms Bentley's notion of the "missing Communist." However, anticommunist figures are prominent in the play: they are the villains. Anticommunism is portrayed as connected with racism. As Brenda Murphy claims, writing about the play almost fifty years later:

Central to Fast's melodrama is the equation of ethnic prejudice and anti-Communism, the converse of the Right's equation of Communism and ethnicity. As Fuller puts it in the play, 'Reds? Jews and Red? That's a fairly common equation.' The play implies that the moral bankruptcy of the Communist-hunters is clearly allied to, if not motivated by, ethnic prejudice.<sup>34</sup>

In the character of Mr. Fuller, anticommunism is also linked with misogyny in the play. Moreover, the political fight is turned into a question of morality. Jane and David's friends, the Andrews, who support the anticommunist witch hunts for opportunistic reasons, are a bored suburban couple who cheat at bridge and on each other. They are contrasted with the faithful and idealistic Jane, who can't help but follow the Communist cause in the end of the play. For these reasons, Murphy writes that the play represents a "morality play in the theatrical idiom of a modern melodrama."<sup>35</sup>

While the play might seem too programmatic, we must also consider the strong moral cast of culture in this period. *Thirty Pieces* is easy to understand, with a black-and-white morality and clear political message. These factors, along with

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33. Eric Bentley, "Broadway's Missing Communist," *Commentary*, 22.3 (Sept 1956), 313.

34. Brenda Murphy, *Congressional Theatre: Dramatizing McCarthyism on Stage, Film, and Television* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 89.

35. Murphy, 90.

comprehensibility, were integral to Soviet cultural norms. In the contemporaneous drama, good and evil (distinguished according to the objective, absolute and articulated Truth) were supposed to be clearly differentiated and demonstrated in a play, as theatre was supposed to educate its audience and help build the new society.<sup>36</sup>

One of the key tasks of theatre was to realistically depict life but at the same time prescribe and show progress as desired by Marxist-Leninist theoreticians. Fast's play falls into the category of what Janoušek et al. describe as plays that show how the revolutionary fight can be brought to the enemy.<sup>37</sup> Jane undergoes almost a schematic transformation, typical for socialist realist plays of that time: confronted with the merciless practices of the American system, she can no longer continue with her everyday life as it was and has to join the revolutionary struggle. The boundaries between actual events and theatrical or literary account of them were often blurred in critical discourse of the time: the reviews of the play stressed that the play was "a document about the growing cultural and political decay in USA,"<sup>38</sup> or "a cut out of the life of the contemporary America."<sup>39</sup> In the print edition, this was also stressed by Fast's accompanying letter where he writes that the play's events are typical for America of that time.<sup>40</sup>

The play was translated by Ota Ornest, a writer and director, an important personality in postwar Czechoslovak drama. In the introduction to the translation, Ornest claims that he was given a free hand by Fast concerning changes to the play. Allegedly, Fast wrote that he considers drama to be "collective effort."<sup>41</sup> As we will see, Ornest used this privilege.

There are three versions of the play: the 1951 translation by Ornest, the additional changes sent by Fast and the printed English version from 1954. By comparing these three, we can see both what the translator in the Communist Czechoslovakia changed and what Fast had to change under the influence of CPUSA. Interestingly, these often overlap.

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36. "Budovatelské drama," in *Dějiny české literatury 1945–1989, II, 1948–1958*, eds Pavel Janoušek et al. (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2006), 251.

37. Ibid.

38. "Skutečná tvář dnešní Ameriky," *Mladá Fronta*, April 1, 1951, 3.

39. Alena Urbanová, "Poselství z Ameriky," *Lidové noviny*, March 31, 1951, 5. "It is only behind the Iron Curtain that audiences believe Howard Fast's play *Thirty Pieces of Silver*, with its American Judas, to be a representative picture of American life." Bentley, 313.

40. "kolektivní úsilí" "Autor našemu obcenstvu" in *Třicet stříbrných*, trans. Ota Ornest (Prague: Osvěta, 1952), 9.

41. Ibid.

In Ornest's translations, we find changes made for dramatic effect, such as the shortening of certain dialogues. Ornest also often uses more general terms in order for the play to be understood by the target audience. However, the main difference between the translation and the original is that in the Czech version, the critique of America and especially its racial prejudices is more stressed. Moreover, the equation between anticommunist and racist characters, the feature noted by Murphy, is further deepened in the translation. When Mildred talks about the relationship between her husband and Agronsky, the "missing Communist," she says "Andrews doesn't like Agronsky. I like Agronsky."<sup>42</sup> In Czech, Marta (according to contemporary custom, Christian names of the characters, apart from David and Hilda, are replaced by Czech equivalents) adds that her husband does not like Agronsky because Agronsky is a Jew.<sup>43</sup> David uses the Czech equivalent of the word "nigger" very often in the Czech translation of the play. In the English version, he mostly only hints it, not having the opportunity to finish the word due to the angry reaction of his wife.<sup>44</sup>

One of the most significant changes are in a speech by the main villain, Carmichael. In the English version, he describes the whole atmosphere of suspicion and the discharging of people:

Human beings create the situation that starts that process, but the process itself is quite inhuman. The process is simply necessary so that you and I can continue to draw our pay and do whatever satisfies our respective souls. (51)  
Ornest, however, made the speech almost twice as long. Here is the translation of what the villain is saying in the Czech version.

There is a widespread process taking place in America. This process has to do with what they call un-American activities. People—people that undoubtedly have or used to have their own truth are the cause of this process, but people are not important to the process itself. You should understand. If a few people are to be sentenced so millions can live better, the process would be... somehow human. But these few people will be excluded so we, you and I, can still draw our salaries every month and live to satisfy both our soul and our body.<sup>45</sup> (57)

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42. Howard Fast, *Thirty Pieces of Silver* (New York: The Blue Heron Press, 1954), 22. All subsequent citation are from this edition.

43. Fast, *Třicet stříbrných*, trans. Ota Ornest (Prague: Osvěta, 1952), 65. All subsequent citation are from this edition.

44. In *Being Red*, Fast mentions the quarrels over this word, when he wanted to use it in one of his historical novels. This was objected to by the Party. Fast, *Being Red*, 50.

45. V Americe probíhá široce založený proces. Proces o tak zvané neamerické činnosti. Lidé—lidé, kteří nepochybně mají nebo měli svou pravdu, způsobili ten proces, ale při samotném procesu už na lidech nezáleží. Rozumějte: kdyby těch několik lidí mělo být odsouzeno proto, aby miliony lidí mohly lépe žít, byl by to proces... řekněme, lidský. Ale těch několik lidí bude znemožněno proto, abychom my dva, vy a já, mohli i nadále pobírat každého prvního svůj plat a žít k spokojenosti své duše i těla.

Here Fast argues that prosecution of people for the greater good is justifiable: when the people were prosecuted in Czechoslovakia or the Soviet Union, it was done only so “millions can live better.” The prosecution in America, however, is not even a case of wrong ideology. The only thing that capitalist bourgeoisie in America cares about, according to this translation, is money.

The character of Hilda, the African-American maid who works for the family, changes most dramatically. It was especially CPUSA that demanded that this character had to be more progressive. In the older version of the play, Hilda is more or less passive until the very end. Fuller also hints at the possible sexual relationship between her and her employer David. In the newer version, she is far more outspoken. The Czech appendix approvingly notes this change and it claims she is now “a type of the self-confident, class-conscious woman.”<sup>46</sup>

This is not the first race problem Fast encountered during his time in the Communist Party. With his 1950 play *The Hammer*, Fast was unhappy about the casting choices: a son from a Jewish family was played by an African American actor.<sup>47</sup> The discussion of *Thirty Pieces* reflects the one flaw Fast was guilty of in the eyes of the Communist readership worldwide. He devoted more time to describing reality than prescribing solutions for it. Ornest also ends his flattering introduction to *Thirty Pieces* with the hope that the America Jane went to search for will be the setting of Fast’s next play.<sup>48</sup>

However, this America was also constructed by the translation. In the English version, Jane simply says, “We’re in our own land—ours as well as yours and Fuller’s” (96). In the Czech version, however, she elaborates on this vision and speaks about the “homeland of all honest people”<sup>49</sup> which can never agree with David’s “masters.” Her last words and the final words of the play are “I am going to follow them, to search for my United States” (XVI).

## 5.4 The Face of America

The role of Fast’s writing as representative of America started even before he became a cult on the other side of the Atlantic. During World War II, he worked at the Office

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46. “typ sebevědomého, třídně uvědomělého pracujícího člověka” Dodatek, I.

47. Howard Fast, *The Naked God, The Naked God: The Writer and the Communist Party* (New York: Praeger, 1957), 272.

48. Ota Ornest, introduction to *Třicet stříbrných*, trans. Ota Ornest (Prague: Osvěta, 1952), 12.

49. “vlast všech poctivých lidí” “Půjdu za nimi a budu hledat své Spojené státy.”



of War Information as he wrote broadcasts to occupied Europe. As he recalls years later:

The whole face and image of the United States had been handed to me, and what I wrote would be most of what the dark pale that was occupied Europe would know of what we were planning and doing.<sup>50</sup>

Before he fell out of favor, the State Department had his book translated and published his book *Citizen Tom Paine* (the novel later accused of immorality) in Serbo-Croatian, Slovene, Greek, Albanian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Polish, Czech, Slovak and Rumanian “as if *Citizen Tom Paine* were destined to be the face of America in every Middle European country.”<sup>51</sup>

Not only his texts were endorsed but also his face: as Sorin claims, Fast’s portrait was in every bookshop in East Germany.<sup>52</sup> Fast was *the* American author, sometimes the *only* American author. He was America. His account of America was understood in terms of much more than literature: as Djagalov claims, the readers in the Soviet zone “approached his books as, among other things, ethnographic sources on contemporary American life.”<sup>53</sup> This was caused simply by the absence of information on the US.

In Fast’s writing, the US/USSR dichotomy, so important for Cold War identities, is replaced by a different vision. Phillips describes it as follows: “The United States should become communist because that would be a return to its original ideals; Russia should be supported because it is the greatest exponent of Americanism.”<sup>54</sup> Fast was therefore seen as a writer who, although he is geographically placed on the other side of the Iron Curtain, has joined “our vision of America.”<sup>55</sup>

For American literature in Czechoslovakia, this duality later opened a “crawl space for culture.”<sup>56</sup> Moreover, in February 1957 (following the Khrushchev revelations and events in Poland and Hungary) Fast publicly denounced the Soviet Union and left CPUSA. The Czechoslovak press exploded with reactions and called Fast’s deed “moral suicide” and a “personal tragedy.”<sup>57</sup> Fast reportedly “betrayed his

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50. Fast, *Being Red* 10.

51. Fast, *Being Red* 19.

52. Sorin, 142.

53. Djagalov, 43.

54. Phillips, 490.

55. “naši vizi Ameriky” Skála, 2.

56. Quinn, 85.

57. “morální sebevražda”, “osobní tragédie” “Morální sebevražda H. Fasty,” *Rudé právo* November 1, 1957, 3.

own work, betrayed himself, betrayed the people.”<sup>58</sup> The other side of the outraged reaction was the quiet joy of the people in the publishing industry: “When Fast left the Party, we were delighted, finally we had the opportunity to publish somebody else.”<sup>59</sup> Before 1957, Fast was granted the monopoly on America and on the Czechoslovak canon of American literature. Fast’s public denouncement of his previous beliefs meant destabilization and decentralization of this canon.

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58. “zradil své dílo, zradil sám sebe, zradil lid” Ivan Skála, “Železný zákon,” *Rudé právo* July 3, 1957, 2.

59. “Konečně jsme měli příležitost publikovat někoho jiného.” Kondrysová, 163. Fast himself bitterly reflected this fact in his memoir published shortly after his break with the Party, *The Naked God: Writer and the Communist Party* (1957): “On February 1, I simply ceased to exist on one-sixth of the earth's surface. All reference in retrospect also ceased, so I not only was not but had never been.” Fast, *The Naked God*, 20.

## Conclusion

In 1952, the Czech literary critic Jaroslav Bouček prophesied that “the future literary historian, dealing with the 1950s, will bring forth the true literature of those countries which are now suffering under the imperialist oppression.”<sup>1</sup> This prophecy remained unfulfilled. Until the last decade, the only place one might find the writers listed in his book as true American writers, were East European secondhand bookshops. However, critics are now reconsidering the 1950s in American literary history: at the onset of the Cold War, there were attempts to define the true national literature by excluding unsuitable texts on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Literature is one way to tell a particular story about oneself and about the enemy; and for the reader, it was one of the rare sources of information about what was happening on the other side.

In Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1956, the voices and the faces of America were carefully chosen and what did not fit was excluded, destroyed and silenced. The writers selected to represent that country’s literature were the members of what was seen as progressive America. The condition for getting such a literary visa was not membership in CPUSA, but the way they depicted the US. In both their lives and works, Howard Fast and Langston Hughes, revealed a particular story about the United States, a story of racial and political oppression. Although this depiction was used for propaganda, their story was not invented. They dealt with the topic of America also because they had to defend their position as American writers within their own culture: they, too, sang America.

The Cold War opposition played a profound role in shaping the literary canons on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In literature in translation, radically different canons emerged. Examining these canons helps us not to localize “the true literature” in Bouček’s sense, but to disturb the accepted canons and problematize nationalist literary narratives. After all, looking at texts published in exile has been a common practice in Eastern European literary criticism since the 1990s. But the Cold War

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1. “Příští literární historik, až se bude zabývat padesátými lety dvacátého století ukáže, kde je skutečná literatura zemí, v tomto období ještě trpících imperialistickým útlakem.” Bouček, *Trubadúři nenávisti*, 45.

cultural exchange worked both ways. The Czechoslovak critics often dealt with texts which were silenced in the US. As it is obvious from the cases of Fast and Hughes, this did not imply that they understood them better. They criticized and translated these texts according to the norms of the cultural politics of this period. However, it was the tension between the texts themselves and the norm that finally produced a new, hybrid space.

The texts by both Fast and Hughes, as the main representatives of America, created this space for US literature. In Hughes, this tension emerged between the message his poetry was supposed to convey and the language of his poetry. Fast in his works stressed the existence of progressive America, which was, however, strongly dependent on his person. His departure left an opening for another representative of contemporary American literature. This fact, together with broader political changes, allowed novels by Hemingway, Faulkner and others to be published. From this time on, battles over publication of certain titles were fought in afterwords and articles. A new generation of translators, editors and critics employed various strategies and methods in order to both present some authors as progressive, i.e. belonging to the Other America, and, at the same time, to gradually broaden the notion of what a progressive author was. Where there was previously little space for maneuvering and negotiating meaning, new possibilities now opened.

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